

TWO OF A KIND

*THE IDENTITY OF COOPERATION SCHOOLS IN THE NETHERLANDS AND
THE CORRELATION WITH RELIGIOUS EDUCATION*

Erik Renkema

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TWO OF A KIND

THE IDENTITY OF COOPERATION SCHOOLS IN THE NETHERLANDS AND THE CORRELATION WITH RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

[TWO OF A KIND]

[DE IDENTITEIT VAN SAMENWERKINGSSCHOLEN IN NEDERLAND EN
DE RELATIE MET LEVENSBESCHOUWELIJK ONDERWIJS]

(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

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Promotor: prof. dr. M. Barnard

Co-promotor: dr. A. Mulder

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CHAPTER 1

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction: once upon a time in the outskirts of Friesland

All parents are invited to attend this special gathering. They are parents of the children at a public school and of a confessional school, both situated in a village in the border region of Friesland, a province in the north of the Netherlands. Most of them have shown up. Teachers from both schools are there. The two principals are going to talk about their motivations and ideas. It's an important moment for the parents and the teachers, all of whom take the children's upbringing seriously.

It has been two years since the topic was first addressed. A group of parents from the public school expressed their concern about the small number of students that attended their school. They asked the teachers and the principal: Wouldn't it be better for their children to attend school with more classmates of their own age? It was one of the teachers who raised a radical follow-up question: What if we get together with the students of the Christian school? In one new school?

That day, two years before the gathering, the dialogue between both schools started. The Christian school and the public school, two schools in one small village: could they merge to become a new school that could stay open? What topics had to be discussed? What would education look like? What pedagogical approach would do justice to the history of both schools? And what about religious education? Both schools had their own specific identity, their inspiration for educating children, and both had their own practices of religious education. What would be the identity of the new school? Public, Christian, or something in between, something unifying?

The answers to these questions are the main focus of this gathering. Parents and teachers assemble in small groups to discuss the plans that are communicated. These plans are about the identity of the new, merged school, the cooperation school, and about religious education in the new context. The principal of the school describes some background factors and aims of the plans. He ends his speech with a statement: 'It is not a question of whether the wine will have to be watered down, but whether we make new wine.'

One year later, all the students of the former public school and Christian school visit the new school. Parents, students and teachers are enthusiastic. One of the students has made up a new name for the school: The Bridge. A ceremony is held to open the school in the new building. A cooperation school has been launched.

2. *Research topic*

2.1. *The Dutch educational system*

In the Dutch educational system, a school is either a nongovernment school or a public school. A public school is neutral in terms of religious affiliation. This means that a public school cannot define or motivate its education from any religious point of view. This principle is applied in practice by admitting every student and staff member, regardless of cultural, ethnic or religious background or sexual preference (Bakker and Ter Avest 2014; Ter Avest 2003; Zoontjens 2003). Such a school also actively engages the religious backgrounds of its students. This approach to religious diversity is called ‘active multiformity’ (Veugelers and De Kat 2005) or ‘active plurality’ (Bakker and Ter Avest 2014). The approach can be interpreted as a way of paying attention to religious diversity in classes and in society based on equality (Faber 2012; Bakker and Ter Avest 2014).

A nongovernment school is defined as a school that was originally founded by private organizations or persons and is based upon a religious or philosophical orientation (Zoontjens 2003). The Dutch constitution confers the right for every nongovernment school to receive governmental subsidy, to the same extent as public education (Zoontjens 2003). Therefore, the authorities of the nongovernmental school have to belong to an acknowledged religious or philosophical orientation, and education and teaching staff have to meet standards of quality and virtue (Zoontjens 2003; Noorlander and Zoontjens 2011; Glenn and De Groof 2012). About 67% of all primary schools are nongovernment schools: most are confessional schools based on the Protestant tradition or the Catholic/Roman-Catholic tradition (from orthodox to ecumenical) (Bakker 2011). Other denominations include: Jewish, Islamic, Hindu, General-Nongovernment, Humanistic, Anthroposophical. In our research, we call this type of schools *nongovernment*, because they originate from a private initiative by a government-acknowledged religious or philosophical orientation. Public schools are funded by the government, in such a way that every child in the Netherlands can receive public education (Zoontjens 2003).

In most public schools as well as in nongovernment schools, the student population is differentiated based on religious affiliation (Bakker 2011; Ter Avest et al. 2007).

2.2. Cooperation schools

Cooperation schools (in Dutch: *Samenwerkingsscholen*) emerged in the Dutch educational system in the 1960s and 1970s (Derriks, Roede, and Veugelers 2000). In 2006, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science counted the number of cooperation schools for primary education (Centrale Financiën Instellingen 2006). The list indicates that in 2002, twenty and in 2006, thirty cooperation schools for primary education were counted (0.28% and 0.43% of all primary schools, respectively). In the last year of our PhD research (2018), we identified 72 cooperation schools for primary education.

Cooperation schools are the result of a merger between one or more public schools and one or more nongovernment schools. Two distinct school identities, reflecting the core characteristics of each school, come together in a new school. A cooperation school is attended by students from a non-affiliated background and by students from a confessional background. We must emphasize that it is definitely not the case that all non-affiliated students originate from the former public school; in most cases, the former nongovernment (and confessional) school could also have been attended by non-affiliated students. Moreover, not all religiously affiliated students attended the nongovernment school before the merger. We see an increase in cooperation schools in those areas of the Netherlands where student numbers are decreasing: fewer people tend to live in those areas. As a result, schools find ways to survive and/or to maintain a school in the village. Figure 1 shows the decline in population:

In rural areas, most people are from a Protestant, Catholic or non-affiliated background. Other religions are more likely to be found in urban areas.

During the years of this research, a cooperation school was legally either a public school or a nongovernment school. Dutch education law makes it extremely difficult for schools considering merging to become a cooperation school in a formal sense: without belonging to one of both categories in the dual system (a nongovernment or a public school). The duality in the system is embedded in the Dutch constitution: exceptions are limited by strict legal regulations. Therefore, all the schools we investigated are either a public school or a nongovernment school in a legal sense. However, cooperation schools do not present themselves as either of these, but instead see themselves a third category school: an innovation within

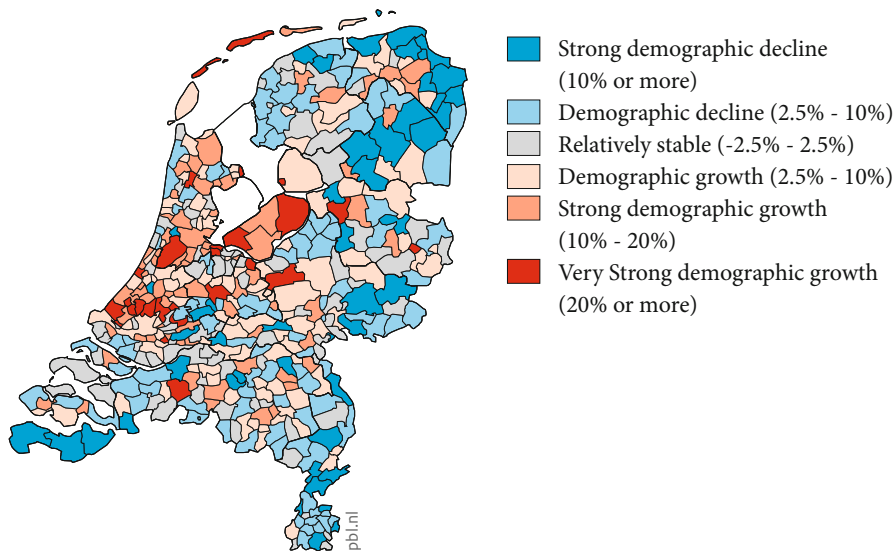


Figure 1. Demographic trends in the Netherlands 2010-2040 (Ritsema van Eck et al. 2013)

the dual system. Dutch law sees these type of schools as ‘informal’ cooperation schools. ‘Formal’ cooperation schools that meet legal and governmental standards hardly exist. In 2017, Dutch law was amended to make it possible for ‘informal’ cooperation schools to become formal by law. The new law states that both public and nongovernment identity must be identifiable in a formal cooperation school, therefore guaranteeing both nongovernment and public education for children. It is up to the school and its board to organize the forms and content of the religious identity (Onderwijsraad 2000). In a formal cooperation school, students have the right to receive public education and, according to the value of public education, it therefore has to be accessible for all students, no matter their religion or worldview (Noorlander 2011; Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal 2011). Our context always concerns cooperation schools in the Netherlands, in our case schools offering primary education.

In our analysis of the concrete practice of religious education at cooperation schools, we focus on two practices: moments of contemplation and celebrations. Moments of contemplation are daily moments in which religious themes are presented. We interpret both of these as school rituals: educational practices in which values of community and belonging are expressed (Barnard and Wepener 2012; Henry 1992) and the development of the student’s identity is fostered (Elias 2010; Rautionmaa and Kallioniemi 2017).

3. *Research question and research aims*

A former public school and a former nongovernment school are faced with the challenge of creating an identity for a new school that teachers, parents and students can identify with. In the merging process, many discussions are held between teachers and parents about the core values of the school and the organization of religious education. These topics are extremely important in the process of the merger, because each of the merging schools was based on its specific values and had its own religious education, and each school had its unique characteristics. Teachers, students and parents all contribute their own way of life, while teachers embrace their own value-based view on educating children. This is the typical, plural setting of our research. Both sets of value-based characteristics come together in a school that needs to develop views and practices in which the identity and values of the former schools are incorporated, and in which shared values are discovered. The joining of these distinct identities can lead to discussions about e.g. common values, the coherence between the school values, the personal values and the organization of religious education, and the way religious education needs to be organized. Questions are raised, like: Do the students need to be separated according the lines of the schools? Do all students have to be educated together in religious education? How can practices of Christian religious education be ensured? What are the available options for the Christmas celebration? These questions motivated our investigation of the praxis of cooperation schools. We focused our research on teachers as key figures in the construction of practices that resemble the school identity. They are the professionals who organize education, they make everyday decisions concerning the design and creation of religious education as a possible expression of school values. The teachers are the only representatives of cooperation schools who can demonstrate and motivate the coherence between values and practice. Therefore, it was relevant to study their motives for teaching the way they do. After all, “it is teachers who in the end, will change the world of school by understanding it” (Stenhouse 1981, 104). The central research question is:

What is the identity of Dutch cooperation schools, how do teachers express the identity in religious education, and how does the education meet the requirements of a democratic, plural society?

We answer the research question by describing the practice of religious education and the values in which the teachers' organization of this education is grounded. We investigate both the values and the practices of religious education and shed light on the coherence between values and education. This investigation leads to conclusions and recommendations regarding coherence; we relate the conclusions and recommendations to theory about encounter and equality in religious education and to requirements of a democratic, plural society. After the description of the research phases and our theoretical concepts, we will formulate our sub-questions in section 5.2.

Answering the question contributes to the academic debate about religious diversity in classrooms (Hermans 2004). Theory indicates religious diversity both as a challenge and an opportunity for teachers (Ipgrave 2004). Religious and intercultural education plays an especially important role in this plural setting (Schreiner 2006a). Our research relies on an empirical focus on a specific type of school with students from secular and confessional backgrounds. We explore how the diversity described above is addressed in religious education at cooperation schools and what motives and challenges are attached to dealing with diversity in this way. Our research also develops a perspective on the coherence between school values and the practice of religious education, or lack thereof (Keast and Leganger-Krogstad 2004). Many schools face the challenge of creating a commonality between the school values as interpreted by teachers, students, parents and formal documents on the one hand and the practice of education on the other. Therefore, it is necessary to reflect on these values and on the relationship between these values and the educational practice. Both in public schools as well as in nongovernment schools, teachers "are hardly aware of the formal identity of the school" (Bakker and Ter Avest 2014, 411) or "of how their pedagogical strategies relate to the school's identity" (Bakker and Ter Avest 2014, 411). The coherence between school values on the one hand and the practice of (religious) education on the other hand is a main challenge of every school, but especially of the cooperation school. Especially in classrooms where diversity is apparent, there is "discrepancy between the official identity of the school as it is formulated in official documents, and everyday practice" (Ter Avest et al. 2007, 250). Our research contributes to the current academic discourse on school identity, diversity and religious education (e.g. Faber 2012; Rautionmaa and Kallioniemi 2017; Ipgrave 2004) by elaborating on the values that the teachers of cooperation schools hold dear, how they motivate

the coherence between their values and religious education, and how they explain possible discrepancies between the values and this practice. In line with the results of our research in the participating schools, we contributed to the reflection on the coherence between values and religious education by analyzing the teachers' design of one such practice of encounter. Our results help us understand why and how teachers deal with their values in religious education in a context of plurality.

4. *Conceptual framework*

The main concept we address is school identity. Considering the specific plural context of cooperation schools, we study two aspects of school identity. First, we focus on addressing religious diversity in education as an expression of school identity. Since principals of cooperation schools in our first research phase formulated the concepts of encounter and equality as key values of their school identity, we study these values concerning religious diversity in school. The second aspect of school identity is its expression in the practice of religious education. We investigate both the approach to religious diversity and the concept of religious education as identity markers of the school. We describe our theoretical concepts in the following sections.

School identity (4.1)		
Values concerning religious diversity (4.2)		Religious education (4.3)
Encounter (4.2.1)	Equality (4.2.2)	

4.1. *School identity*

Only a definition of school identity that transcends the distinction between nongovernment and public education is helpful for our research. The focus should not be on schools that are based on a particular religious or pedagogical perspective. Only a transcendent definition can help us explore the identity of cooperation schools that share common values. We have opted for a definition of school identity that is “applicable to schools in general” (Faber 2012, 44). For this reason, we use the definition proposed by De Wolff: “what makes a school this particular school, or, what are the typical or characteristic features of this school, what the members of the school have in common . . . and what can be characterized by a certain degree of durability or continuity throughout time” (2000, 53). De Wolff (2000) describes a multidimensional concept of school

identity: identity is not only interpreted in a religious way, but also in a pedagogical, educational, and sometimes organizational and social way. Ter Avest et al. call this an integrated way of looking at the identity of a school: in this way, school identity is the result of a “coordinated view on education in which the educational theory comprises the pedagogical and didactical as well as the organizational views in mutual relationship with the religious philosophy of life” (2007, 212). Besides this integrated school identity, a restricted identity can be distinguished: the religious identity of the school is interpreted as and recognized in the religious activities in education (Ter Avest 2003; Ter Avest et al. 2007). In line with Ter Avest and Bakker (2007), we interpret school identity primarily as an interaction between the behavior and the beliefs of the teachers and everyday practice. This interaction constitutes the school’s identity, also including the perceptions that are “explicitly written down, e.g. in formal and official school documents” (Ter Avest and Bakker 2007, 122).

In De Wolff’s definition, Faber (2012) recognizes three aspects that she derives from literature about organizational identity: school identity is self-referential, shared and relational. In these aspects, we see an inclusive interpretation of school identity, appropriate for cooperation schools. It is inclusive because these aspects apply generally to all types of schools, independent from the religious or pedagogical orientation of the school (Faber 2012). The self-referential aspect is “a set of beliefs or meanings that answer this self-reflexive question” (Faber 2012, 41). We interpret the self-reflexive question as querying self-identification: How do organizations interpret themselves? What do they hold dear? What values direct their policy and practice? In this line, Mulder (2012) refers to how organizations reflect on their core values. We interpret this search for values as the “typical or characteristic features of this school” (De Wolff 2000, 53). The features have to be described in the context of modern Western society: Mulder (2012) recognizes a coherence between the quest for the self-referential aspect and the fact that the Dutch society is no longer ‘pillarized’, i.e. divided into separated denominations.

The aspect of a shared identity points to the question of which values and self-understanding “the members of the school have in common” (De Wolff 2000, 53) in their perspective on education. We recognize the aspect of a shared identity in the emphasis by Mulder (2012) that existential questions about the quality

of working can only be addressed in dialogue with others. To reach “a shared understanding by a collective” (Faber 2012, 41), dialogue is an important factor. We interpret the relational aspect of school identity as self-understanding in the context of the environment of the school (Faber 2012). Reflecting on the identity of an organization takes place in the context of society (Mulder 2012). The context of schools in the Netherlands is the plural society and its implications for religious education (Jackson 2006; Ipgrave 2004).

All three aspects (Faber 2012) determine the identity of a school. In our research, we see them reflected in the search for values that respondents find characteristic of their schools (self-referential), in the search for commonalities between the teachers and school documents (shared), and in the context of the typical plurality of the cooperation schools (relational).

4.2 Values concerning diversity in classroom

Western societies are more and more religiously plural “in the spheres of religions, values and culture” (Jackson 2006, 21). Even within the same religious tradition, there is a diversity of views (Milot 2006; Bakker 2001). Every school is characterized by a plurality of worldviews and religious convictions: there is no such thing as a religiously homogenous group of students (Milot 2006). Plurality is interpreted as a challenge for schools and teachers (Ipgrave 2004). We see that pluralization in Western societies not only in the existence of multiple religious traditions, but also in the presence of non-religious or non-affiliated people in society and classrooms (Vermeer 2004; Rautionmaa and Kallioniemi 2017). In our societal context, it is important for professionals who work with people to reflect on their professional values and the religious dimension of their job (Mulder 2012).

We focus on two values concerning the approach to plurality in education: encounter and equality. We do so because we recognize an emphasis on both values in the first phase of our research: principals of cooperation schools mention encounter and equality as core values of their schools. In our study of religious education in a plural context, there is a special focus on the perspective of John Dewey. Although Dewey passed away more than half a century ago, his views on education in democratic societies are still referred to in academic discourse (e.g. Webster 2009; Sutinen, Kallioniemi and Pihlström 2015; Ghiloni 2011; Berding

and Miedema 2007). In our study of theory related to Dewey's work, we see a strong emphasis on issues that are still highly relevant to education, aiming at encounter and living together in mutual understanding. These values are also mentioned by our respondents. Besides this correlation, theory that discusses Dewey's views (Sutinen, Kallioniemi and Pihlström 2015; Ghiloni 2011; Berding and Miedema 2007) underlines his plea for concrete practices of dialogue that facilitate expression of encounter between students as being relevant for democratic and interreligious education. Dewey regarded a conjoint living in the pluralistic world and encounter about differences between people as a main challenge for society and education (Webster 2009; Ghiloni 2011; Sutinen, Kallioniemi and Pihlström 2015).

4.2.1 *Encounter*

In a plural society and a school that is characterized by its religious diversity, education in general and religious education in particular should stimulate "a reflective and sensitive encounter" (Schreiner 2006a, 32). Differences in ideas and beliefs are to be explored in order to create mutual understanding on the one hand and to provide enrichment for the development of personal identity on the other (Ipgrave 2004). This encounter serves the ultimate goal of educating young people in order to prepare them to live in a plural society (Miedema and Ter Avest 2011). People with diverse values and convictions are challenged to live together and contribute to their shared goal of a peaceful society based on equality. This diversity contains religious as well as non-affiliated and secular views on life and on the world we live in.

Encounter in classrooms is positive, in our opinion. We adopt Andree's perspective: "[What is] necessary is education in dialogue, respecting each individual's uniqueness, looking for communal aspects in the different life views, being conscious of equality of all humans and a common responsibility to construe new fundamentals for a true humanity in a multi-religious society" (1995, 30). We regard dialogue as a key aspect of encounter in religious education: addressing plurality in the classroom and in society (Keaten and Soukup 2009; Leganger-Krogstad 2003) requires challenging students to meet each other. "Religious education is thus a conversational process in which students, whether from 'secular' or 'religious' backgrounds, continuously interpret and reinterpret their own views in the light of their studies" (Jackson 2004, 18). We attach value to encounter for two reasons.

First, encounter in plural settings can foster identity formation among students. Confronted by and in dialogue with views and experiences that are unfamiliar or different than their own views, students can reflect on their personal position and can add something new to their identity and view of life (Elias 2010; Vermeer 2004; Rautionmaa and Kallioniemi 2017). Encounters in the context of diversity have a positive effect on the development of the student's personal identity. We underline the importance of the exploration of students' personal life experiences and views in religious education in encounter, which contributes to students' identity formation (Schreiner 2006a; Ghiloni 2011; Wardekker and Miedema 2001b). The encounters between students from different backgrounds are particularly enhanced when this exploration is encouraged (Miedema 2000; Wright 2004; Zondervan 2012): "Pedagogically, the more aware teachers are of beliefs and values embedded in the experience of students, the more they can take account of pupils' concerns and can provide teaching and learning situations which are designed to foster communication between students from different backgrounds" (Jackson 2004, 108).

Second, encountering differences in education and religious education in particular also stimulates students' attitude of tolerance and openness (Elias 2010). Encounter promotes peaceful ways of living together and building bridges between people that have diverse religious perspectives (Miedema and Ter Avest 2011; Rautionmaa and Kallioniemi 2017; Gabriel 2017). The social dimension of educational practices is underlined by Wardekker and Miedema, who "formulate the aim of the school as enabling pupils to participate in socially and culturally structured practices that take place at a certain time and that are located within a particular societal setting" (2001b, 80). We recognize such practices in the rituals that we investigated: moments of contemplation and celebrations. We see them as rituals with a social dimension (Henry 1992) that enhance the expression of the school identity and the value of encounter. Encounter reflects a challenge in Western societies like the Netherlands: people with specific religious affiliations and values, and people with secular views on life and the world we live in, are called upon to build bridges and contribute to a society that is based on equality and mutual understanding. We interpret encounter as a condition of both the organization and the content of religious education that fosters the exploration of diverse views of students. Encounter is based on equality of these views and of a variety of sources aiming at the development of each student's identity. Our focus on encounter opens the opportunity to ask questions about segregated classes in religious education and about the dominant role of one

specific religious tradition in this education: “To teach each child in its own faith and in its own version of that faith risks the social harmony and tolerance at which education aims” (Knight 1998, 70).

4.2.2 *Equality*

We interpret the concept of equality in two ways.

First, we see equality as a value that makes it possible to treat every student’s opinion and every voice in a multireligious society as valuable for dialogue. No point of view is dominant. Religious education aims at fostering the sense of equality (Zondervan 2012). Religious education needs to foster students’ attitude of equality, trust and respect in encountering others, building bridges between people of diverse religious perspectives (Miedema and Ter Avest, 2011; Keaten and Soukup, 2009). Our second interpretation of the concept of equality is the way schools deal with sources in religious education. In the plural context of Western societies, we see that a diversity of sources and traditions can provide existential meaning: people create their personal identity from a variety of sources (Mulder 2012). In the context of religious diversity, the equality of religious sources has to be advanced in religious education. When diversity is a feature of the student population and of society, a multiplicity of sources are worth being explored by students (Boeve 2004; Vermeer 2004). In these interpretations of equality, the encounter in religious education is enriched by the plurality of student backgrounds as well as by a dialogue with several religious sources.

4.3 *Religious education*

Although we are aware of other terms (e.g. ‘worldview education’, cf. Van der Kooij 2016; Valk 2017), we follow the current dominant and international use of the term ‘religious education’. We underline the commonalities between the concept of worldview education and religious education. Although we use the term ‘religious education’ for the pragmatic reason that we seek to follow the dominant discourse, we interpret this in the same broad sense as worldview education. We recognize the link between the concepts in the following guiding principles. First, our interpretation deals with the important role of worldview traditions, religious and non-religious sources, in their “considerable depth and longstanding contributions (...) to culture, science and learning” (Valk 2007, 281). Traditions concern questions about life and death and “ground particular moral values and action, and offer responses to the profound moral and worldview dilemmas” (Valk

2007, 280). At inclusive schools, like cooperation schools, there is no emphasis on any tradition (Alberts 2007; Valk 2007).

Second, our research is directed by the basic position that the experiences and views of students are addressed in religious education as well as in worldview education (Jackson 2004; Schreiner 2006b).

Our third position that links both concepts is the appreciation of religious diversity in school. This diversity is visible in classrooms because “children do not leave their values and deeply felt convictions outside when they enter the classroom” (Milot 2006, 15).

An important focus in our perception of religious education is John Dewey’s perspective, which is important for three reasons. First, his view aims at pluralistic democracies (Ghiloni 2011; Sutinen, Kallioniemi and Pihlström 2015). Conjoint living in the pluralistic world where encounter about differences between people can be a challenge for society is a central point of Dewey’s views.

Second, his plea for concrete practices of dialogue that facilitate expression of encounter between students is underlined as being relevant for democratic and interreligious education (Sutinen, Kallioniemi and Pihlström 2015; Ghiloni 2011; Berding and Miedema 2007).

Our third reason concerns Dewey’s view that living together in democratic societies is fostered when religion is “brought down to earth, to what is “common” between human beings” (Sutinen, Kallioniemi and Pihlström 2015, 335). Religious educators that work with religious and non-religious students can still benefit from Dewey’s focus on the exchange of common life experiences that “must be able to transcend this divide” (Webster 2009, 97).

In our view, religious education deals with students’ development of identity by engaging with, reflecting on and communicating about religious and secular traditions and sources that provide a view on life, living together and the world – a view that the student can relate and respond to.

5. *Method*

5.1 *Qualitative study*

In order to answer our research question we designed qualitative research methods. In qualitative research, the researcher uses a “naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena within their own context-specific settings” (Gray 2014, 160). For our context of cooperation schools and their teachers and principals, we have opted for a qualitative study rather than a quantitative approach; “through intense contact” (Gray 2014, 162) with the subject, we can discover and explore views, beliefs and motivations of the respondents. Hardly any research has been done so far on this specific subject. Therefore, it is important to study the group closely and concentrate on their perspectives on educating children and on their practices of religious education. As Gray (2014) points out, it is an important objective of qualitative research to gain information about the perceptions of the participants. A qualitative study, based on a variety of empirical instruments, is most suitable to explore these perceptions and values in depth. In order to achieve our aim of generating new knowledge about coherence between school values and the practice of religious education, or the lack thereof, we need to find out how teachers “act and account for their actions” (Gray 2014, 162). We want to “make routine features of everyday life problematic” (Silverman 2013, 15). This insight provides us with information that can foster their practice. The phenomena we try to understand are the practices of religious education and the values that motivate the practice of cooperation schools.

Our curiosity about the values of the schools and the coherence between those values and religious education within the plural setting directed our “typical case sampling” (Gray 2014, 217/218) of the selected schools. This kind of sampling process meant that we selected schools with distinctive characteristics: throughout our research, all the primary schools in the target group needed to be the result of a merger between a public school and a nongovernment school. In selecting teachers, we used purposive sampling (Gray 2014). The study of their values and their practices made it possible to reach our objectives. In this choice, we used intensity sampling as well as homogenous sampling. Intensity sampling delivers “information-rich cases that can provide detailed information” (Gray 2014, 218) in our research on the values of teachers and coherence between those values and religious education. We describe the

values of the teachers in depth, looking at them as a homogenous group with commonalities concerning their position at cooperation schools (Gray 2014). In sections 5.2.1 to 5.2.4, we describe how the respondents in every phase were selected in these sampling processes and the selection criteria that were used.

5.2 *Phases and instruments*

The field of religious education and the education of students at a cooperation school represent a complex reality. Different perceptions and research angles are necessary to provide a clear and balanced perspective of this field and a possible answer to the research question. Data triangulation helps us to reach this balanced perspective. The “collection of multiple sources of data” (Gray 2014, 267) needs to be focused by introducing a theoretical structure that helps to “direct the data collection and analysis process” (Gray 2014, 267). All our empirical instruments were structured by our understanding of theory about school identity (4.1), values concerning religious diversity (4.2), or religious education (4.3).

In order to prepare the qualitative study, we mapped the field by means of an online questionnaire in 2013. The results showed what school values and what practices of religious education could direct our follow-up. The online exploration also made it possible for us to describe some facts of cooperation schools in the Netherlands, such as the date on which the schools were founded, the merging partners, identity of the school board, and how religious education was organized. These facts of the cooperation schools provided necessary information for the qualitative in-depth exploration that followed. After the analysis of the questionnaire, we conducted five case studies from 2014 to 2016. The studies revealed underlying views, values and beliefs, their coherence (or lack thereof), and their relationship with the existing practice of religious education. The use of case studies is considered to be an effective approach to the “integration and contrasting of different perspectives (that) can build up rich and detailed understanding of a context” (Gray 2014, 163). We used both a single case study (phase 2, Chapter 3, see also: 5.2.2) as well as a multiple-case study (phase 3, Chapter 4, see also: 5.2.3). Using a single case study, we were able to explore the practice and the motives in depth, which helped us “to better understand a particular case” (Gray 2014, 274). When analyzing multiple case studies, we managed to compare data and to find an “underlying structure” (Stausberg and Engler 2011, 377).

In phase 4 (Chapter 5, see also: 5.2.4), we designed a participatory action research study in order to detect what motivations and challenges the teachers face when they are asked to create such an experimental celebration. In phase 5 (Chapter 6, see also: 4.3 and 5.2.5), we incorporated Dewey’s perspective on democratic education in order to describe possibilities for teachers at cooperation schools to align their religious education to their values.

The aforementioned phases cover the next five sub-questions:

- a) How do cooperation schools construct their identity and what are the implications of this identity for the organization of religious education?
- b) How are the key values of a cooperation school and of its teachers exerted in the practice of religious education?
- c) How do teachers of cooperation schools express school values and their vision on encounter and dialogue in segregated moments of contemplation and in the organization and performance of a collective celebration?
- d) What are the teachers’ motives for pursuing an experimental celebration at a cooperation school, what concepts and design requirements are involved, and how can this celebration be evaluated from a theory of dialogue and from the teachers’ perspective?
- e) What is the contribution of Dewey’s concept of democracy to the reflection on values and religious education at cooperation schools?

We describe the phases and the corresponding sub-questions after this overview:

Chapter	2
Period	2013
Article	Renkema, E., A. Mulder, and M. Barnard. 2016. Merging Identities: Experiments in Dutch Primary Education. <i>Religious Education: The official journal of the Religious Education Association</i> 111 (1): 75-94.
Research question	How do cooperation schools construct their identity and what are the implications of this identity for the organization of religious education?
Research group	Principals of 17 cooperation schools
Strategies of enquiry	Quantitative survey

Table continues

Data collection method	Online questionnaire Analysis of online documents
Coding strategies	Descriptive Coding Values Coding
Chapter	3
Period	2014
Research question	How are the key values of a cooperation school and of its teachers exerted in the practice of collective religious education?
Article	Renkema, E., A. Mulder, and M. Barnard. 2017. Key Values of a Dutch Cooperation School and the Practice of Religious Education. <i>British Journal of Religious Education</i> . DOI: 10.1080/01416200.2017.1361380
Research group	Teachers of one cooperation school
Strategies of enquiry	Single case study
Data collection method	- study of school documents - study of lesson guide for religious education - video recording and subsequent analysis of the moment of contemplation - teacher interviews and subsequent analysis.
Coding strategies	Descriptive Coding Values Coding
Chapter	4
Period	2016
Article	Renkema, E., A. Mulder, and M. Barnard. 2018. Religious Education and Celebrations in a Dutch Cooperation School. <i>Religion & Education</i> . London: Routledge, DOI: 10.1080/15507394.2017.1416886.
Research question	How do teachers of cooperation schools express school values and their vision on encounter and dialogue in segregated moments of contemplation and in the organization and performance of a collective celebration?
Research group	Teachers and key informants of four cooperation schools
Strategies of enquiry	Multiple-case study

Table continues

CHAPTER 1

Data collection method	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - questionnaires for teachers - interviews with teachers - interviews with key informants
Coding strategies	Descriptive Coding Values Coding

Chapter	5
Period	2016/2017
Article	Renkema, E., A. Mulder, and M. Barnard. 2018. <i>Dialogue in Religious Education at a Dutch Cooperation School. A Pilot Study</i> . Manuscript submitted for publication.
Research question	What are the teachers' motives for pursuing an experimental celebration at a cooperation school, what concepts and design requirements are involved, and how can this celebration be evaluated from a theory of dialogue and from the teachers' perspective
Research group	Teachers at one cooperation school
Strategies of enquiry	Participatory action research
Data collection method	School documents School website Audio recordings of teacher meetings Written artefacts from teacher meetings Participant reports Video recording of celebration
Coding strategies	In Vivo Coding Values Coding Pattern Coding

Chapter	6
Period	2017/2018
Article	Renkema, E., A. Mulder, and M. Barnard. 2018. <i>Dutch Cooperation Schools as Democratic Communities. A Constructive Perspective from Dewey's View on Democracy in Education</i> . Manuscript accepted for publication by <i>Religious Education: The official journal of the Religious Education Association</i> .

Table continues

Research question	What is the contribution of Dewey's concept of democracy to the reflection on values and religious education at cooperation schools?
Research group	None
Strategies of enquiry	Conceptual study
Data collection method	None

5.2.1. Phase 1

In our first phase, we mapped the field by answering the question of how cooperation schools construct their identity and what implications that has for the organization of religious education. We selected cooperation schools based on a formal list of all primary schools, supplied by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. Based on this list and an analysis of online documents of the selected schools, 35 schools were found. The analysis of the school websites helped us to verify whether the schools in the list identified themselves as cooperation schools and whether they were the product of a merger between a nongovernment school and a public school. After this analysis, a questionnaire was sent online to the principals of all the 35 schools. The questionnaire was semi-structured: the 25 questions contained eight open questions, five multiple choice questions and twelve questions with specified answers as well as an empty field to add personal answers. One category of questions provided us with information on facts about the school, such as the year of origin, the original merging identities and the identity of the board. Another category contained questions about the integrated school identity and, especially, tried to uncover what key values the respondents considered characteristic for their school identity. A category also focused on the restricted identity, and asked about the organization of religious education. Seventeen principals replied by answering the questions. The provided data were collected and analyzed.

We interpreted the answers in the open field of the open-structured questions and some open questions by using Descriptive Coding (Saldaña 2009): characteristic central ideas in the answers are extracted from the individual data. We used Descriptive Coding because this approach allowed us to gain a clearer understanding of what is going on in the general field of cooperation schools and provide a foundation for the following phases of our research (Saldaña 2009). Two questions were asked about values and educational goals in the formal documents of the schools. We used Values Coding (Saldaña 2009) to get a clear

perspective on the school values as described in the documents in order to detect the “participants’ values, attitudes, beliefs, representing his or her perspectives or worldview” (Saldaña 2009, 89).

To check the reliability of the data, a non-response inquiry took place. We conducted an analysis of the online documents of the remaining schools. Five themes were compared with the results of the online questionnaire: the origin of the identity of the merged schools, the board identity, key values, admittance policy and the organization of religious education. The information from the non-response inquiry could not in all cases be extracted from the online documents: some simply could not be found, while others were not easy to interpret. Therefore, only the data that were traceable were compared with the data from the respondents.

5.2.2. *Phase 2*

In the second phase, we conducted a single case study. Because the results of our first phase indicated a group of schools that organize collective religious education for all students, we were curious about the motivations and the concrete practice, in relation to the school values. We selected a school that exemplified this type of schools: a school where formal documents mention equality and respect as key values, which organizes collective religious education for all students together. A single case study provided us the opportunity to study “multiple units of analysis” in order “to better understand a particular case” (Gray 2014, 274). The case study made it possible to study the school in depth from different angles: the school values, the didactics and the content of moments of contemplation, and the motives and values of the teachers. We analyzed school documents and the lesson guide for religious education, video recordings of moments of contemplation, and teacher interviews.

For the analysis of the recorded moments of contemplation, we constructed an observation format. In this format, several aspects are specified under the following categories: time, physical space, participants, activities, sources, religious content. In order to investigate the values and motives of teachers, we interviewed them at their school and analyzed the transcriptions in a data-analyzing computer program (QDA-miner) using codes and sub-codes. We used two coding strategies: Descriptive and Values Coding (Saldaña 2009). This approach allowed us to discover the current practice of religious education and what values grounded the

practice. We differentiated between teachers' personal and professional values. This allowed us to detect what motives guide teachers in structuring the moment of contemplation.

5.2.3. *Phase 3*

Our third phase was conducted to answer the question of how teachers of cooperation schools express school values like encounter and dialogue in segregated moments of contemplation and in the organization and performance of a collective celebration. We opted for a multiple-case study at cooperation schools with segregated classes for religious education, because these schools were the second type that came out of the data in our first phase. The other type, that of the cooperation school with collective religious education, was studied in phase 2. So far, we have not investigated what motives teachers mention for organizing segregated religious education and for celebrations, and how these motives relate to their values and the values of school. Four schools with segregated moments of contemplation and collective celebrations were selected from the set of phase 1. We conducted a multiple-case study and used multiple sources: we used questionnaires for teachers, since it allowed us to collect information from many respondents in a limited period of time (Gray 2014). Another source, which followed the questionnaire, was that of the interviews with teachers and key informants. These interviews enabled us to get insight in more detailed clarifications of the respondents, to understand their motives, and to provide the respondents the opportunity to reflect on their motives and experiences (Gray 2014). The respondents were teachers who are responsible for the moments of contemplation according to public education and to Christian education. A thematic analysis was performed, using QDA-miner in two steps. In the first step, theoretical concepts concerning religious education in a plural context were used to structure the data. The concepts were: classroom encounter, equality of sources, and students' life experiences. We chose the concepts because they were indicated as key values of the schools in the first two phases of our research (see Chapters 2 and 3) and because theory mentions them as key aspects of religious education in a plural context (see sections 4.1 and 4.2). In the second step, we coded our data using an inductive approach: multiple codes were identified in the data and categorized. We conducted Descriptive and Values Coding (Saldaña 2009) in the analysis of three questions in the questionnaires (Values Coding) and of the interviews (Descriptive and Values Coding). Each code was linked to a category that was based on

theory: classroom encounter, equality of sources, and attention for students' life experiences. Descriptive Coding was used for pointing out what basic topics were characteristic for the data. Values Coding was used for determining how the practice of religious education and celebrations was valued by the teachers. Together, the coding strategies answered the question of how school values relate to the practice of religious education, and the extent to which teacher appreciate how they relate.

After the first three phases, the data showed a discrepancy between the values of school documents and the opinions of respondents on the one hand, and the content and organization of religious education on the other hand. In particular, the practice and facilitation of encounter between students was limited. Therefore, we designed a research context in which a new way of dealing with the discrepancy could be created in the form of an experiment: a pilot study.

5.2.4. Phase 4

The pilot study was designed as participatory action research in order to detect what motivations and challenges the teachers face when they are asked to create such an experiment. In this phase, we selected one school that faced an explicit discrepancy as detected in phases 2 and 3. Teachers and the principal of the school underlined this discrepancy in phase 3 and expressed their willingness to participate by trying to design a new practice in which the discrepancy was dealt with. We answered the question of what the teachers' motives are for pursuing an experimental celebration at a cooperation school, what concepts and design requirements are involved, and how this celebration can be evaluated from a theory of dialogue and from the teachers' perspective. We used various kinds of data. School documents and website entries were subjected to a content analysis to create a picture of the schools' vision on education and on religious education and to get acquainted with the key values of the schools. The results were inserted in the discussions in group sessions. To monitor the design and evaluation process, which took place in four group sessions, all sessions were audio recorded. Moreover, we retrieved participant reports from each session. The recordings, written artefacts (products from the sessions, like values for educating and design requirements for a celebration, written on paper) and the participants' reports were subjected to content analysis by various coding techniques. The content analysis was structured by topics related to our research question (concepts, motives, values, design requirements,

evaluation). In a first cycle, In Vivo Coding and Values Coding strategies (Saldaña 2009) were used. By using In Vivo Coding, we were able to detect values and views on religious education as they were described by the participants themselves (Saldaña 2009). Their concepts and terms were used to negotiate design requirements of the celebration and again for the evaluation of the celebration. In the second cycle, categories were described following the process of Pattern Coding, summarizing the views and perceptions of the participants “into a more meaningful and parsimonious unit of analysis” (Saldaña 2009, 152). This enabled us to detect common threads in the participants’ vision and to relate the threads to theory about dialogue.

5.2.5. Phase 5

So far, we have investigated values of the cooperation school according to documents and the teachers and the coherence with religious education at these schools. We saw that practices of religious education showed a lack of consistency with the school values. Therefore, in our final stage, we incorporated Dewey’s perspective of democratic education (see section 4.3). This reflection can motivate teachers at cooperation schools to align their religious education to the values they cherish: encounter and equality. In section 4.3 we elaborate on our motives for choosing Dewey’s perspective.

5.3 Reliability and validity

To increase validity, all empirical instruments set up by the researcher were grounded in theoretical concepts. For the same purpose, the instruments were tested with respondents from cooperation schools or other stakeholders and discussed with the PhD supervisor and co-supervisor. After these discussions, the final versions of the instruments were realized. The instruments were tested to check correspondence to the research question for each specific phase. We recorded all interviews and practices by using video or audio recording equipment (Gray 2014). In the case studies in phases 2 through 4, we returned our interpretations of the data to the concerning principals and teachers for a member check. To check the data, a non-response inquiry took place at the end of phase 1. We conducted an internet analysis of the online documents of the remaining schools. To increase the reliability of the results, we used methodological triangulation, employing “varieties of data-gathering techniques” (Gray 2014, 185). We studied the research question from different angles in order to arrive at a varied scope

for our research subject. For reliability reasons, all relevant empirical data in all research phases were coded and analyzed by using a digital program called QDA-miner. The analysis of all results from the coding process was discussed by the researcher and the co-supervisor in order to reach inter-raters consensus. Furthermore, reliability was increased by a consistent use of research procedures. Peer debriefing concerning the articles (Chapters 2 through 6) has been provided by the supervisor and the co-supervisor, as well as (for Chapters 2 through 5) by double blind review in the submission process of international journals for religious education. Articles 1 and 2 (Chapters 2 and 3) have been commented in a session of the Theology & Worldview research group at Windesheim University. Results of the research were also shared with PhD researchers at NOSTER (Netherlands School for Advanced Studies in Theology and Religion), researchers in the field of practical theology of the Protestant Theological University, and with teacher trainers and researchers at international conferences of the Religious Education Association and the European Teacher Education Network.

6. *Outline*

This dissertation consists of 5 central chapters. Each chapter was written as an academic article for an international peer-reviewed journal.

Chapter 2 describes the results of the first phase of our research: an online exploration of key values and religious education practice at cooperation schools. Our motive for mapping the field of all the cooperation schools for primary education was to explore similarities and differences in the school values as interpreted and mentioned by school principals and to detect common threads in the practices of religious education. These two reasons for this overall research provided the opportunity to design our further research based on the results.

We have to keep in mind the distinction between ‘informal’ and ‘formal’ cooperation schools (see section 2.2) while reading Chapter 2. Principals of these ‘informal’ cooperation schools answered our question by stating how they provided public education. However, this question refers to the obligation of ‘formal’ schools to offer this education. ‘Informal’ cooperation schools are legally either a nongovernment school or a public school; the first, the confessional school, does not have to meet this obligation. Still, all the principals did answer this question.

It could therefore be concluded that there is a strong correspondence between the values of public education and those of the cooperation schools investigated here. Chapter 2 answers the question of how these schools construct their identity and the implications of this identity for how religious education is organized. The chapter raises several issues that were very important to the case studies that followed. First, we see that cooperation schools underline key values of equality and encounter, and the mission of living together based on these values. We also detect that the respondents acknowledge both public as well as nongovernment education in the organization of their religious education. Third, segregation of religious education according to the religious origins of the merged schools appears to be a specific feature of most schools. Armed with these conclusions concerning the school values and the related religious education, we entered phase 2 (Chapter 3). Chapter 3 presents the results of a single case study. We chose this specific school as a model for the minority of schools that we detected in phase 1: the schools that provide collective religious education for all students. The research question is how key values of the school and of its teachers are exerted in this religious education. We explored the concrete and everyday practice of religious education in a cooperation school and the perceptions of the school values by the teachers. We have included their perceptions, since they are the professionals responsible for the organization of (religious) education. This chapter shows the results from a content analysis of interviews and videos of the ‘moment of contemplation’, looking at how this practice relates to the key values of the school. We noted that respondents and the school guide speak highly of the social objective of education, and of religious education in particular: working and living together based on respect and encounter. We also noted that dialogue, as a way of expressing this value of encounter, is hardly practiced in their religious education. Respondents state that they value the attention for students’ life experiences in religious education, a value that we scarcely detect in the video recordings. At the end of this chapter, we ask how religious content (in most cases Christian tradition) should be recognizable in religious education and formal documents in a cooperation school. In Chapter 4, we present the results of case studies at four cooperation schools that were studied in phase 3. The data and the analysis describe how teachers deal with the specific religious diversity in rituals: moments of contemplation and celebrations. In this chapter, we investigate the question of how teachers at cooperation schools express school values and their vision on encounter and dialogue, both in segregated moments of contemplation and in the organization

and performance of a collective celebration. This study focuses specifically on the expression of school values of encounter, equality of sources, and the focus on students' life experiences in these rituals. We chose these schools because we had not investigated the practice of segregated religious education in relation to the school values so far. Segregation appeared as a dominant aspect of a majority of cooperation schools in our first stage. Because the attention for life experiences turned out to be an important objective of the respondents in phase 2, we intentionally adopted a theoretical and empirical perspective on this subject: Could the focus on life experiences contribute to the expression of school values? We noted, again, that the respondents emphasized the school value of encounter, in the segregated moments as well in the celebrations. We conclude that these cooperation schools also hardly practice dialogue between students: encounter is limited to divided groups in segregated religious education, and the didactics of a celebration do not show any dialogue. Our empirical data also show an emphasis on Christian tradition and a limited focus on life experiences in religious education.

In phases 1-3, we see a tension between, on the one hand, emphasizing school values and the appreciation of encounter and dialogue by respondents from cooperation schools, and religious education on the other hand. Because of this tension that threatens a praxis based on school values, we chose to learn more about the ritual practice of a cooperation school by means of a participatory action research study that was conducted with the teachers (Chapter 5). This study analyzed how the teachers construct a collective religious celebration for all students from the perspective of dialogue and encounter, and how they motivate their choices in the light of the school's core values. The participatory action research study results in a celebration in which the participants recognize their values on education. We conclude that the teachers, both from secular and from Christian education, underline this new practice as an expression of the value of encounter and consequently of a key concept of their school identity. The teachers who created the celebration emphasize that this dialogical practice gives students the possibility to participate in the dialogue about their experiences with and their views on a general theme. We also conclude that a practice of dialogue can be organized in line with school values, but that this dialogue is, again, limited: there is no focus on any central existential theme that is explored by a variety of perspectives, and the dialogue is not moderated professionally.

In our fifth and final phase, we provide a specific perspective that sheds light on possible ways to deal with the mentioned discrepancies and with the implementation of this view in religious education. This perspective can help teachers and principals at cooperation schools to reflect on the educational values in their unique setting and on the coherent correlation between these values and the practice of religious education. In our sixth chapter, we demonstrate how Dewey's perspective can help school teams develop a fundamental vision on a conscious construction of dialogical educational practices. We conclude that in religious education, democratic practices of dialogue and exploring differences have to be organized explicitly and intentionally in order to embody values of school identity and foster the student's identity. We also argue that, in line with Dewey's view on democratic education, the development of students' identity and their competences of respect and openness are fostered more firmly in collective moments of contemplation and celebrations where students from all possible religious backgrounds are present and challenged to meet everyone. Finally, we also advocate using a variety of sources in the content of religious education. By doing so, teachers manifest equality of traditions and convictions as a key value of cooperation schools.



CHAPTER 2

MERGING IDENTITIES. EXPERIMENTS IN
DUTCH PRIMARY EDUCATION

Abstract

In this article the authors present the results of their research of cooperation schools in The Netherlands. These schools are an exception in the dual educational system because they originate from a merger of a religiously neutral public school and a religious school. The data, provided by school principals, show key values of the cooperation schools. These values are compared to characteristics of public education. The authors also focus on the organization of religious education. This study is a first step in a broader research of Dutch experiments concerning the merging of different religious school identities.

1. *Introduction: religious identity and primary cooperation schools*

Like all education in The Netherlands primary education (for children of 4-12 years) is characterized by its duality: a Dutch school can be either a school for public education (a public school) or a school for non-government education. The Dutch constitutional law in Article 23 indicates that, on one hand, public education is initiated and provided for by the government, and that, on the other hand, private organizations or persons can found a school based upon a religious or philosophical orientation: non-government education (Glenn and De Groof 2012; Noorlander and Zoontjens 2011; Zoontjens 2003). A public school is legally provided for by the government, a non-government school is a result of a private initiative (Glenn and De Groof 2012). Since a few decades, however, there is an exception to this common system (Glenn and Zoontjens 2012). Some schools for non-government and for public education are merging or are considering merging. A school that is a product of this kind of merger is, by law, called a 'cooperation school'.

When a religiously neutral school (i.e. public) merges with a religious school, two distinctive identities come together to form a new school. The central question in this article is, therefore: How do these schools construct their identity and what are the implications of this identity for the organization of religious education?

To answer this question we will first need to discuss the precise definition of 'religious identity' (2.1), explain religious values and religious education of public (2.2) and non-government education (2.3) and provide an outline of the background of a cooperation school and its religious identity (3). Then, we can explore empirically in what way these cooperation schools answer this question (4).

2. *The Dutch educational system and cooperation schools from legal perspective*

Article 23 of the Dutch Constitution warrants the existence of both non-government and public schools. In 2006, this article was amended to include the cooperation schools. However, the duality of ideals continues to exist within the cooperation schools because the identity of both public as well as non-government education has to be identifiable (Eerste Kamer der

Staten-Generaal 2011; Onderwijsraad 2000; Noorlander 2011). It is here that our first question surfaces: What is meant by the identity of a school and, in particular, the identity of public and non-government education?

2.1. *Religious school identity*

One of the fundamental values of the dual educational system concerns the religious dimension of the identity of schools. This dimension also plays a very large role in the arguments and in laws concerning cooperation schools.

School identity can be viewed in two ways: restricted and integrated. De Wolff defines 'school identity' as "that what makes a school this particular school, or, what are the typical or characteristic features of this school, what the members of the school have in common (...) and what can be characterized by a certain degree of durability or continuity throughout time" (2000, 53). She describes a multi-dimensional concept of school identity: identity is not only interpreted in a religious way, but also in a pedagogical, educational and sometimes organizational and social way. Ter Avest et al. call this an *integrated* way of looking at the identity of a school: in this way, the religious dimension (religious values and views) influences the other dimensions of identity (Ter Avest et al. 2007; Ter Avest 2003). Besides this integrated school identity, a *restricted* identity can be distinguished: the religious identity of the school is interpreted as and recognized in the religious activities in education (Ter Avest et al. 2007; Ter Avest 2003). We will discuss public and non-government education and cooperation schools according to these two perspectives of school identity: the integrated and the restricted.

2.2. *Public education and religious identity*

Regarding the integrated school identity, one of the main values of public education, and therefore guaranteed within the cooperation school, is its religious neutrality (Bakker 2012; Zoontjens 2003; Ter Avest 2003; Noorlander 2011; Ter Avest et al. 2007). This means that a public school cannot define or motivate its education from any religious point of view. Next to this fundamental value, another basis characteristic of public education is defined by the Dutch educational law: public education "must contribute to the development of its students by paying attention to religious, ideological and social values as they occur in Dutch society, and by recognizing the importance of the diversity of these values" (Law Primary Education, article 46; Bakker 2012; Glenn

and De Groof 2012). Public schools actively engage religious backgrounds of their students. This implies, for instance, that public education has an 'open door' policy; admitting every student and staff member disregarding cultural, ethnic or religious background or sexual preference (Bakker 2012; Zoontjens 2003; Ter Avest 2003). This acknowledgement is called 'active multiformity' (Braster 1996; Veugelers and De Kat 2005). Where active multiformity reflects the integrated identity of a public school, restricted identity can also be recognized. Clearly defined religious education is organized in different ways. In the first place religious education in a public school can occur in the form of educating students about different religions and life stances, "in an informative and objective way" (Kuyk 2012, 136). The main objective, in this case, is the spreading of knowledge of ideas, sources and practices of traditions that play an important role in the Dutch society. Every school in the Dutch educational system is required to integrate these contents into their curriculum (Ter Avest et al. 2007; Ter Avest 2003; Veugelers and Oostdijk 2013). In our empirical study this kind of education is called 'education different religions'. The second form is the obligation of a public school to enable students to receive some kind of voluntarily denominational religious education. In The Netherlands, there are teachers of the Protestant, the Catholic, the Islamic, the Hindu and the humanistic tradition. This kind of education is provided by religious groups and religiously affiliated teachers, who are not a part of the school team and are sent by the religious group. The authorities of the public primary school do not carry responsibility for this type of education (Zoontjens 2003; Bakker 2011; Ter Avest 2003; Ter Avest et al. 2007; Glenn and De Groof 2012).

2.3. *Non-government education and religious identity*

Non-government schools can be established based on religious or philosophical orientation. This 'freedom of orientation' gives religious or philosophical orientated groups the possibility to express their values in an educational setting (Glenn and De Groof 2012; Noorlander and Zoontjens 2011; Zoontjens 2003). There is a difference between non-government schools and truly private schools: the first type has the constitutional right to receive public subsidy (Glenn and De Groof 2012) and is constitutionally settled.

Several religious and philosophical groups may found their own schools. These groups, however, are never ecclesiastical institutions as such (Glenn and De

Groof 2012). Characteristic for Article 23 in the Dutch Constitution is the right for every non-government school to receive governmental subsidy. Therefore, the authorities of the non-government school have to belong to a, by government, acknowledged religious or philosophical orientation and education and teaching staff have to meet standards of quality and virtue (Zoontjens 2003; Noorlander and Zoontjens 2011; Glenn and De Groof 2012). The government only has influence on the quality of the education, and it can decide whether or not the school has a sufficient number of students.

About 67% of all primary schools are non-government schools: most are religious schools based on the Protestant or (Roman-) Catholic tradition (each 30%) (Bakker 2011). Other main religious and philosophical orientations in non-government primary education are: 'neutral' (religious identity and religious education without any priority of a specific tradition), Anthroposophic, orthodox Jewish, liberal Jewish, Evangelical, Hindu and Muslim (Glenn and De Groof 2012).

Non-government schools based on a similar point of view may nevertheless interpret their integrated identity differently. This is expressed by the way they offer and organize their education (Miedema and Vroom 2002). For example, the Protestant schools display several different interpretations of their conceived identities. Moreover, combinations within different denominations also exist: ecumenical (Protestant and Catholic schools merged) (De Wolff 2000; Bakker 2004). This differentiated practice is illustrated by the right of a non-government school to admit or to remove students (Zoontjens 2003). Where most schools admit all students (Noorlander 2011; Glenn and De Groof 2012), about 5% maintain strict regulations for admittance and expulsion of students based upon the orientation of the school (Zoontjens 2003; Glenn and De Groof 2012). Because of the open admittance policy most of the groups of students at non-government schools are religiously differentiated (Bakker 2011; Ter Avest et al. 2007).

Concerning the restricted identity "religion is central to the characteristic aspects of these schools" (Ter Avest et al. 2007, 209). The religious basis is recognizable in several practical choices and activities. Firstly at most schools teachers are appointed in accordance with the religious identity of the school (Kuyk 2012). Secondly: because religious education at most non-government denominational schools is based on a specific religious tradition, these schools offer lessons in

which the content of the tradition is taught. Also specific traditional feasts and other activities are celebrated (Kuyk 2012).

And thirdly, like public schools, non-government schools are obliged by law to pay attention to the education about different religions and life stances. “For the religiously affiliated schools this is often related, however, to the religious education as it is taught in accordance with the particular identity of the school” (Kuyk, 2012, 136).

3. The cooperation school and religious identity

In 2006, the possibility to create a cooperation school was founded in an adjustment of the Dutch Constitution. The Dutch parliament agreed on an addition in which it was stated that public education can be received “whether or not in a public school” (Dutch Constitution, Article 23, section 4). Local authorities are obliged to ensure that students receive public education (Noorlander and Zoontjens 2011). This means that they have the right to attend a school where religiously neutral education is ensured. If there is no possibility to maintain a public school in a village or a part of a city, the authorities have to ensure that public education is realized in a different way. One of these ways is a cooperation school. By law, the cooperation school, according to the value of public education, therefore has to be accessible for all students, no matter their religion or worldview (Noorlander 2011; Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal 2011). Yet, a cooperation school is neither a specific public school, nor a school for non-government education. Hence the adjustment in the Constitution: public education is not necessarily to be given at a public school.

Here it must be added that a cooperation school cannot be founded: an entirely new school is not allowed to be a cooperation school. It can only be a product of a merger of two or more schools of different identities or a product of the (expected) closing down of one school and the expansion of the other with the type of education that was given at the school that was closed down or is expected to close down. (Onderwijsraad 2000; Zoontjens 2003; Noorlander 2011; Huisman 2010).

Cooperation schools appear in those areas in which the number of students decreases. In 2006, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science counted the number of cooperation schools for primary education (Centrale Financiën Instellingen 2006). The list indicates that in 2002 20 (0,28% of all primary schools)

and in 2006 30 cooperation schools for primary education (0,43%) were counted. These numbers disregard the primary schools for students with special educational needs.

Especially during the decades of 1960 and 1970 the number of attempts to start a cooperation school increased (Derriks, Roede, en Veugelers 2000). Although they were an exception to the common system, they were tolerated by the government. Also, organizations representing public and non-government education expressed a reluctancy to the phenomenon of the cooperation school (Derriks et al. 2000). The educational law was not adjusted until 2011 (Glenn and De Groof 2012). Then, a cooperation school was described as follows: “A cooperation school is a school in which public as well as non-government education is offered” (Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 32 134 2011, 2).

This means that public and non-government identity must be identifiable in a cooperation school. It is up to the school and its board to organize these forms and content of integrated and restricted religious identity (Onderwijsraad 2000).

So far, we have described the integrated and restricted identity of a cooperation school by referring to its legal obligations and to its values. A special characteristic of both the integrated and the restricted identity is that different religious values and different perspectives of religious education come together in one school. In classes and staff religiously neutral education (i.e. public) has merged with religious education (i.e. so far Protestant and/or Catholic).

Little research has been done to answer the question on what values and on what (new) identity this cooperation school is based and what the implications of this identity are for the organization of religious education. In an empirical research project Derriks, Roede and Veugelers studied school documents of four primary cooperation schools and two secondary cooperation schools (Derriks et al. 2000). Moreover, they interviewed the principals of these schools. Although this research of Derriks et al. also describes cooperation schools, our research will provide a more general and more valid perspective on this theme: the number of respondents is larger. Therefore differences and similarities will have a more solid base. Moreover, our research strictly focuses on primary schools. By paying attention to primary education only, we can draw conclusions

that concern the specific situation of primary schools, the class teachers and the educational goals that only apply to primary education.

We will answer the question about the religious identity of the cooperation school and the motivations and organization of religious education in the empirical part of this article.

4. *Empirical research of the identity of cooperation schools*

In this section we present the results of an online survey among the principals of cooperation schools for primary education in The Netherlands. To map the whole field of cooperation schools we have chosen for an online survey among all these schools. In this way we were able to reach all the schools in a relatively short period of time. Our objective is to gather a deeper understanding of their integrated and the restricted identity.

4.1. *Design*

The first step of our empirical research was to design a questionnaire, based on three sources. In the first place, it was based on the theoretical study of the integrated and restricted identity of public and non-government education and of cooperation schools. A second basis was the information received from representatives of the national center of Christian education (Besturenraad) and of the association of public schools (VOS/ABB). From these representatives and from a random search on the internet the names of ten cooperation schools were found. The study of the school directory of these schools and the dialogue with two principals formed the third basis of the questionnaire.

A draft of this questionnaire was sent to the representative of VOS/ABB, the chairman of joined Christian primary schools in the province of Zeeland and a principal of one of the ten schools. Their feedback was included in the final version of the questionnaire.

For the second step in our research, we selected the specific cooperation schools that originated from a merger of a public school and one or more non-government schools, based on a formal list of all primary schools, supplied by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. The schools for special educational needs were left out in the selection because their regional function can motivate the merger in

another way than in the case of the regular schools.

Based on this list and a web analysis of online documents of the selected schools 35 schools were found. These were all cooperation schools for primary education in February 2013: 0,51% of all primary schools.

The questionnaire was sent online to the principals of all these schools. It was divided into four categories. The first (facts of the school) provided us with information about the year of origin, the original merging identities and the identity of the board. The second category of vision/identity and the third category of policy/choices contained questions about the integrated school identity and, especially, tried to uncover what key values the respondents consider characteristic of their school identity. The fourth category focused on the restricted identity, and asked about the organization of religious education and in what ways this is offered according to values of public education. Regarding the adjustment in the Constitution, we especially tried to discover how the integrated and the restricted identity express public education. The questionnaire was semi-structured: the 25 questions contained eight open questions, five multiple choice questions and twelve questions with both specified answers and an empty field to add personal answers.

The provided data were collected and analyzed. To check the reliability of the data a non-response inquiry took place. We conducted a web analysis of the online documents of the remaining schools. These five themes were compared with the results of the online questionnaire: the origin of the identity of the merged schools, the board identity, key values, admittance policy and the organization of religious education.

4.2. Method

After the first deadline six principals completed the survey. The remaining principals were reminded by email and by telephone. Seventeen principals (48,6%) replied by answering the questions in May 2013. Six principals responded that they did not have the time and/or the priority to participate. There was no response from the remaining principals after the reminders.

In order to analyze the response we first used a quantitative approach: we counted the number of the several possible identities of the boards and of the original identities of the merged schools, and we made an overview of the date of origin of the schools.

Next to these facts we also tabled the answers to the (semi-)structured questions. We interpreted the answers in the open field of the open-structured questions and some open questions by using descriptive coding (Saldaña 2013): characteristic central ideas in the answers are extracted from the individual data. A special focus was the values coding (Saldaña 2013): two questions were asked about values and educational goals in the formal documents of the schools.

The information from the non-response could not in all cases be extracted from the online documents: some simply could not be found, others were not easy to interpret. Therefore, only the data that were traceable were used to compare with the data of the respondents.

4.3. *Some facts of cooperation schools*

Three formal facts were relevant: the year of origination of the school, the identity of the merged schools and the identity of the board.

The majority of the schools (nine) started merging in this century; in a relatively short period, more schools started than during the years preceding 2000. The last four years show a strong increase: from 2010 until May 2013 six cooperation schools opened their doors. This analysis continues along the line of the Ministry stating that the number of cooperation primary schools already increased during the years 2002-2006 (from 0,28% to 0,43%). From five schools of the non-response, the year of origin could not be learned. The youngest school of the non-response originates from 2010. Seven schools started before 2000 and six after 2000.

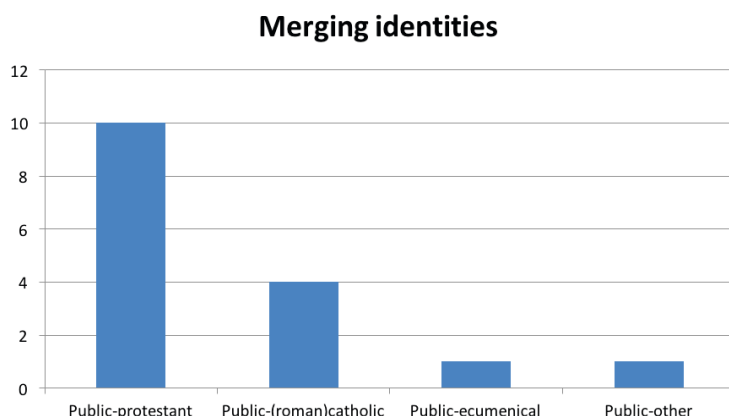


Fig. 1 N=16

As Figure 1 indicates most of the seventeen schools are a merger of a public and a Protestant or (Roman-)Catholic school: a total of fourteen. No schools (that merged with a public school) with another religious origin (e.g. Islamic, Hindu, Jewish) did so. One school is a merger of a public school and an ecumenical school. This corresponds with the data of the non-response: as far as could be indicated all of the cooperation schools are a merger of a public and a Protestant, (Roman-) Catholic or ecumenical school.

One of the seventeen principals mentioned that his school was a product of a merger between a public school and an 'other' school, already being a cooperation school. One school (not mentioned in the graphic) responded that it was founded as a cooperation school. This is remarkable, considering the fact that a cooperation school by law can only be a product of merging and not by founding.

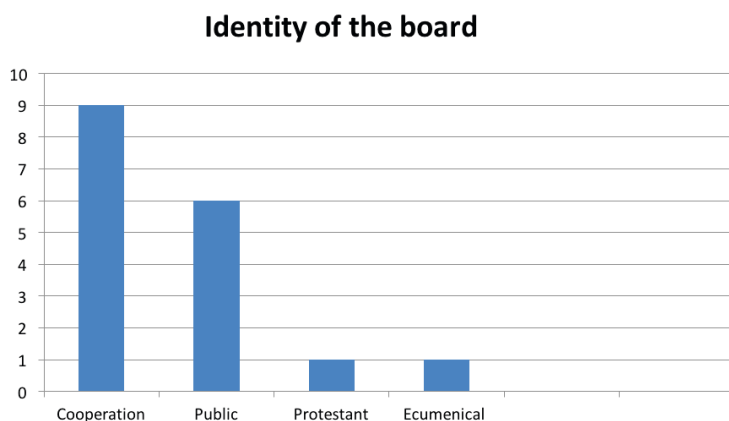


Fig. 2 $N=17$

Nine schools are governed by a board that calls itself a 'cooperation board' (see Fig. 2). This means that the board of the school is merged of different identities as well. Based on the school directories, we can also label the majority (at least thirteen) of the boards of the non-response as a cooperation board. It seems remarkable that eight cooperation schools are connected to a public or religious board. Further research may show whether and how these boards value and develop the legal obligation to express both public and non-government education.

4.4. *Integrated religious identity and policy*

Sixteen school principals indicate that religious identity is described in formal documents.

One question in the survey asked about key values in the formal integrated religious identity that the respondents see as characteristic for their school, it being a cooperation school. The data show that one value is dominant: equality. 'Equality' is interpreted as a certain attitude towards differences within the school population and in society. One respondent writes: "The thought behind a cooperation school is to see the school as a meeting place of different life views. Therefore, our school is accessible for anyone who wishes to participate in this encounter. Regardless of ethnicity or life view" (Respondent A). Five respondents consider 'respect' as typical of the integrated religious identity. This is noticeable, for 'respect' can be seen as an expression of equality: students are raised to encounter a variety of views without any exclusive and dominant view. Other mentioned values resembling 'equality' were: 'mutual understanding', 'encounter', 'trust' and 'dialogue'.

Furthermore, in the online documents of the non-response 'equality' is a key value as well: eight schools mention this specific term. Thirteen (also) mention 'respect'.

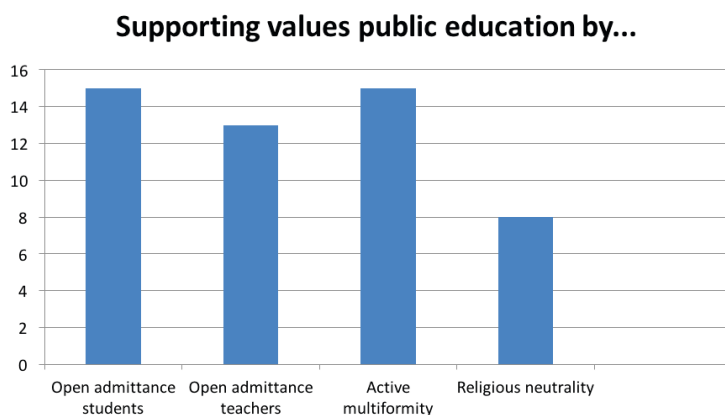


Fig. 3 N=17

(more answers possible)

Another question was asked about possible values of public education that the respondents recognize in the school identity. Based on the theory, we distinguished: open admittance of students, open admittance of staff, active multiformity and religious neutrality. Our question was whether we could identify a connection between the emphasis placed on equality and the mentioned values of public education. All principals recognized values of public education in their identity and policy

(see Fig. 3). Especially ‘active multiformity’ (15) is mentioned. Also the policy regarding the admittance of students (15) and staff (13) is recognized as a value of public education. This corresponds to the data of the non-response. Further research could focus on those few schools from which the principals do not mention this policy of admittance. It would be interesting to see whether these principals do not support the policy of open admittance, or whether they do not recognize this policy as a value of public education.

It is also notable that not all respondents (eight) refer to ‘neutrality’. Again, further research could point out whether the respondents do not see their schools as neutral, or whether they do not connect this to an explicit value of public education.

According to the adjustment of the Dutch Constitution public education has to be recognizable at a cooperation school. Further research could focus on possible reasons why principals do not mention the four values of public education together. Do the principals classify these values in a specific order? And, if so, can we conclude that the respondents never identify the four values together as characteristic for their schools? Or, maybe at the same time, do the principals interpret these values in another way than is suggested by the theory about public education?

We can see a correspondence between the active multiformity as a value of public education and the key value of cooperation schools. Both share the same view: there are no dominant traditions and convictions and, therefore, all can contribute to the development of students.

Another remarkable result concerning the religious identity and policy of the school must be mentioned. By answering the question whether or not there have been causes to adjust the religious identity of the school fifteen respondents deny that these causes occurred. Apparently, the principals see the religious school identity as a strong concept.

4.5. *Restricted religious identity: religious education*

The response of the principals indicates that the religious identity of the cooperation school is expressed in concrete activities. In the survey, the following question was asked: “Can you indicate a decision or a reflexion in school practice in which the

religious identity of the school plays or has played an important role?” Thirteen respondents say they can, and refer to concrete activities. For example, the celebrations of religious feasts are mentioned: “Christmas always returns as a yearly point of discussion. Do we or do we not celebrate this feast in church?” (Respondent I). But the religious identity is also shown in lessons in religious education, in the choice of themes in these lessons and in the selection of staff members. The majority of the respondents indicates that the religious identity is often or always discussed during another concrete activity: the job interviews with potentially new staff and the intakes with parents. All seventeen principals say they discuss the religious identity of the school during these activities at least occasionally.

We asked two questions about the organization of religious education in order to find out in what ways this organization provides possibilities to handle the religious plurality of the students and the legal obligation to offer public as well as non-government education.

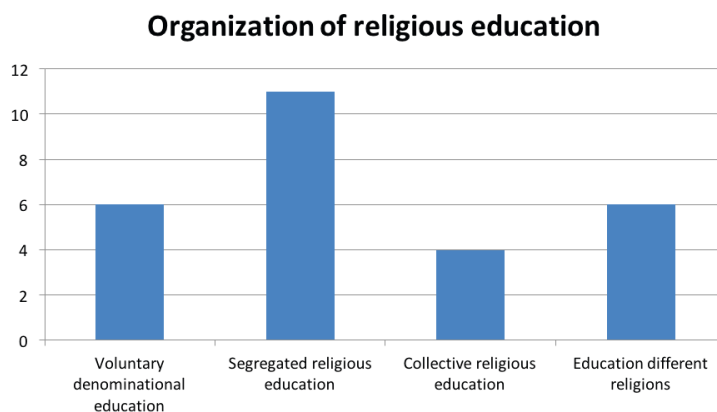


Fig. 4 N=17

(more answers possible)

Our first question was about possible ways of organizing religious education. Four options were provided: do students attend lessons of voluntarily denominational religious education, is religious education divided into separated lessons according to the religious origins of the merged schools, do students attend religious education in a collective way, do the teachers provide education about different religions?

Eight of the seventeen principals indicate that their religious education is a combination of these options.

Six schools organize religious education by offering education about different religions. One principal indicates that this education is the public alternative to education according to the Catholic tradition. It seems remarkable that more principals (nine) state that they support values of public education by offering this education. One other, very dominant, result can be based on the answers to this first question. As Fig. 4 shows, eleven principals indicate that religious education is segregated according to the religious origins of the merged schools, that “several times a week, separate lessons in religious education are provided according to different religious backgrounds by a teacher who is related to this specific background.” Or, as one respondent answers: “Parents can choose once a year for either religious education according to Christian or education according to the public identity” (Respondent E). This education is provided by the regular class teacher, and not by a teacher who is sent by a religious group.

Surprisingly this result does not entirely correspond to the non-response. Although the online documents do not all clarify in what way religious education is organized, at least seven schools offer religious education in a collective way: one program for all students. To this at least three of them add a voluntarily religious education according to the Protestant or Catholic denomination to this. The documents of two schools mention that they organize religious education segregatedly, according to the religious origins of the merged schools.

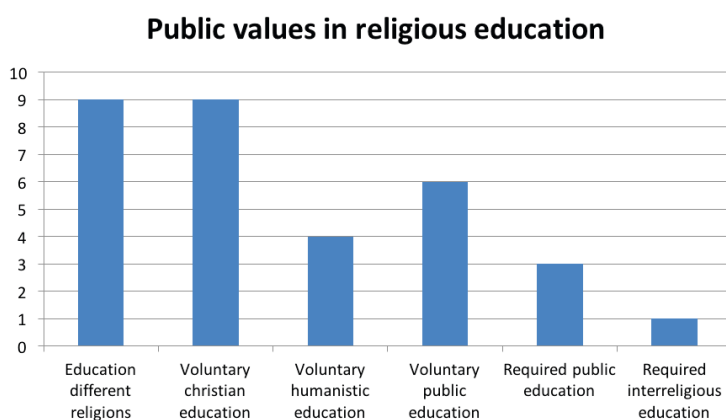


Fig. 5 N=17

(more answers possible)

The second question in the survey, concerning the restricted identity, was directed to the legal obligation of the cooperation schools to offer public education. To find out how the values of this public education are recognizable in religious education, the respondents were questioned about the very concrete transfer of these values within the restricted identity. One question was asked about this transfer: “How do you offer religious education according to values of public education?” As Fig. 5 shows, nine principals answer by referring to the lessons in which students are educated about different religions. Apparently, these principals consider this education to be a central characteristic of public education.

Nine principals recognize values of public education by providing voluntarily religious education according to the Protestant or Catholic denomination. Four respondents (also) offer voluntary religious education according to humanistic values. Six principals see values of public education in lessons in public, secular education on a voluntary basis. Three schools offer obligatory public, secular education. Further research may tell us more about the content of this obligatory secular education, and compare it to other ways of offering religious education: do the respondents see this education as different from e.g. the education about religions and, more importantly, how do they claim to insure that non-government education is expressed, as the law indicates?

These results show that all respondents recognize the values of public education in the offering of (some kind of) religious education within their school, but they also show that the organization of religious education differs greatly with regard to these values.

4.6. *Conclusions and discussion*

4.6.1. *Conclusions*

Formally a cooperation school is not a public school. However, students at these schools do visit a school where values of public education are supported, and where this education is offered. This is an important first conclusion, concerning the integrated identity.

A cooperation school is based on the key value of equality, which corresponds with the active multiformity of a public school. In practice, this means that the

school is accessible for all students and staff members, regardless of their religion or worldview. The data of the non-response confirm this conclusion.

We can conclude that the respondents indicate that values of public education correspond to those of their cooperation schools. Thus, there is no difference between a public school and a cooperation school. Although the research of Derriks et al. (2000) does not relate to values of public education, it also indicates that the respondents attach importance to shared values in Dutch society, especially concerning the contact with other people.

The adjustment to the Dutch Constitution concerning the receiving of public education “whether or not in a public school” can be seen as a grounded adjustment towards cooperation schools: a cooperation school can be seen as a school where the legal obligation to offer public education is observed.

The second conclusion concerns the restricted identity, especially the religious education at cooperation schools. We distinguish two points regarding this education: the first relates to its content and the second to its organization. Firstly, the results confirm that public education, in religious education, can be received at a cooperation school. Still, this education is quite diverse: its contents varies from education about religions to religiously affiliated education by an external teacher. Secondly, in contrast with a public school, the majority of the cooperation schools offer religious education in another way, and by the class teachers themselves; segregation of religious education according to the religious origins of the merged schools is a specific feature of most schools. This conclusion can also be recognized in the research of Derriks et al. (2000). In these cases, students (and/or their parents) choose a specific identity of religious education. It seems striking that the non-response appear to show other results: collective religious education is more common at these schools.

As our third conclusion we see that the respondents feel that the religious identity of their schools is especially expressed by concrete activities such as the celebrations of especially religious feasts and religious education. This result also corresponds with the results of Derriks et al. (2000). Apparently, the respondents interpret the integrated identity of their schools as transferred to restricted identity.

4.6.2. *Suggestions for further research*

The first suggestion for further research concerns the organization of religious education.

Two aspects of this education are important. First, we could focus on this religious education in comparison to values of public education. Since a majority of the respondents indicate that religious education is segregated, it could be interesting to investigate in what way the value of active multiformity is expressed by this segregation: how does the acknowledgement of religious diversity correspond with this organization of religious education?

Further research concerning religious education could also investigate the content of religious education according to public education. The results show little conformity concerning this education. One might like to discover whether it is education about different religions, or whether it can be identified strictly with the education as offered by the external religiously affiliated teacher. Similar questions are whether it can be received from a lesson guide that was written for Protestant and/or Catholic religious education, but without the biblical stories and the suggestions for prayer, or whether religious education, identified as public education, can have a profile of its own. We might learn the answer to this last question from the four cooperation schools who claim to provide public religious education for all students. We would like to understand how values of both public and non-government education can be identified in this collective religious education. There seems to be a difference between the schools of the seventeen respondents and the schools of the non-response with regard to religious education. Many of the respondents schools are a merger of a public and a Protestant school and offer segregated religious education, whereas the majority of the non-response has a public and a (Roman-)Catholic origin and seems to provide collective religious education. It may be possible that a collective religious identity is more common at schools that are a merger of public and (Roman-) Catholic than at schools with public and Protestant origins.

It would be quite interesting to discover what these schools with collective religious education can teach us about the motivations and the ways in which religious education contributes to the dialogue between students (and teachers) with different kind of religious backgrounds.

A second focus for further research can be the policy of appointing teachers and the neutrality of the school. Not all respondents confirm that these items are an expression of values of public education. If they do not see neutrality as a key value, the question is what perception they do have of neutrality and whether they select teachers based on religious, cultural or ethnic background or sexual preference. Research could be conducted exploring the possible different ways in which values of public education are interpreted by representatives of the schools, and the question whether or not there are some values of public education that are not or less supported in a cooperation school.

Thirdly, we could investigate how non-government education in a cooperation school is perceived by principals and teachers. After all, this school is obliged to offer both public and non-government education. In the survey, no questions were asked about the status of (values of) non-government education other than those about the religious education. It would be interesting to see how values of non-government education are represented in the integrated identity: representatives of cooperation schools may have specific ideas about non-government education apart from the religious denominational education. Besides this, it seems worth exploring whether there is a possible distinction between cooperation schools with a Protestant and those with a (Roman-)Catholic origin.



CHAPTER 3

KEY VALUES OF A DUTCH COOPERATION
SCHOOL AND THE PRACTICE
OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Abstract

This article presents the results of a single case study from a cooperation school in the Netherlands. A cooperation school is the result of a merger between a public and a denominational school. Students from secular and religious backgrounds meet in the classroom. This religious diversity in this school is explored by an empirical research study. The research question was how key values of the school and of its teachers are exerted in religious education. Content analysis of interviews and videos of the 'moment of contemplation' show that there is a discrepancy between the school values and the practice of this moment. Conclusions concerning a social and a substantive perspective are drawn in the light of theoretical insight concerning diversity in religious education.

1. *Introduction*

The Dutch educational system is characterised by its duality: a school is either public or a non-government school. Public schools are religiously neutral, but “must contribute to the development of its students by paying attention to religious, ideological and social values as they occur in Dutch society, and by recognising the importance of the diversity of these values” (Netherlands Primary Education Act, Article 46). Religious backgrounds of students in all their diversity play an active role in public education. Non-government education is founded by private initiatives and is based upon a specific religious or philosophical orientation (Glenn and Zoontjens 2012). Education in these schools aims at familiarising students with the religious tradition in question. Both public and non-government education receive equal funding from the national government.

Due to the decreasing number of students in several areas across the country, public and non-government schools are merging or considering a merger (Renkema, Mulder and Barnard 2016). These merged schools are called ‘cooperation schools’. In these schools, students from a religiously neutral (public) school and students from a school based on a religious or philosophical orientation (non-government) come together in a new school. One side effect of such mergers is an increase in diversity. However, although diversity is increased, it does not lead to a plurality of religious traditions that the various students represent. This can be explained by the rural context of these schools: almost all cooperation schools arise in areas that are relatively sparsely populated and are less likely to have a multi-religious population. What we see at cooperation schools in terms of religious diversity is that students from secular backgrounds are placed in a school alongside students from religious backgrounds, which is almost always either Protestant or Catholic. This is also the case with the teachers: teachers with a religious orientation work together with secular colleagues. This aspect is especially uncommon in the Netherlands: teachers and students at public schools are not familiar with regular activities of religious education and a school identity that is based on a specific religious tradition. And students and teachers of non-government schools have no experience with a neutral and active multiform view on the religious identity of the school. Therefore, the feature of diversity faces a challenge that is unique and important for the reflection on the Dutch educational system: how can a denominational view of school identity and religious education and a secular view work together

in a new school? In our study, we focus on this specific kind of diversity. Hardly any research has been done on how teachers put this specific diversity into practice or how they substantiate their choices. This article answers the question that arises: how are the key values of a cooperation school and of its teachers exerted in the practice of religious education?

This feature of religious diversity in classrooms is not only identifiable in cooperation schools and in the Dutch context.

Other contemporary Western societies are also facing a rise in religious and cultural plurality, especially the plurality of religious and secular traditions. This plurality challenges schools in general and religious education in particular to deal with this feature (Skeie 2009).

Much research has been conducted on the question of how religious education can deal with the diversity of students from various religious traditions in the classroom (Weisse 2009). But what is done when a secular and a denominational perspective on school identity and on religious education are joined together in educational practice?

The first author conducted a single case study focusing on this practice of a cooperation school, concentrating on the 'moment of contemplation'. During this daily time period, religious content is discussed and contemplated, revealing religious diversity in the classroom. In the school under review here, this moment is one of the two activities of religious education, besides celebrations at Christmas and Easter. There are no other regular activities involving religious education. This 'moment of contemplation' is a well-known phenomenon at Dutch non-government schools: at most of these denominational schools, this moment is based on one specific religious tradition. Most public schools are unfamiliar with these moments. In cooperation schools, both this familiarity and the absence of previous experience with these moments come together in educational practice. We regard the 'moment of contemplation' as an example of religious education that expresses the school identity: an identity marker.

Our results will show how teachers interpret school values and personal values in the context of the diversity of religious and secular students and how these values are exerted in the moment of contemplation. They provide points of interest for teachers and principals of primary schools who want to gain insight into everyday didactics and content in religious education and in school policy regarding

religious diversity. It can also provide scientific insight with regard to the balance between school values and religious diversity in the classroom.

2. *Religious Education and Diversity*

Like many other European societies (Jackson 2006), the Netherlands is a society that exhibits religious diversity. This diversity is also visible in classrooms because “children do not leave their values and deeply felt convictions outside when they enter the classroom” (Milot 2006, 15).

In our previous research on cooperation schools (Renkema, Mulder and Barnard 2016), principals of these primary schools mentioned the following key values as part of the school identity: equality, respect, encounter, dialogue and mutual understanding. These values try to provide a response to religious diversity in classrooms. However, we have not yet investigated the ways in which didactics in religious education reveal these values and address this diversity, and the motives for doing so. In this article, we will try to find a connection between these values, religious diversity and the everyday practice of religious education. We will do so by focusing on the expression of the institutional identity based on these values in the religious education.

2.1. *Diversity in religious education*

Religious diversity in classrooms presents both a challenge and an opportunity for teachers (Ipgrave 2004). In the context of our research on the diversity of students from either a secular or a denominational background, we elaborate on two important characteristics of religious education dealing with diversity.

First, education should stimulate “a reflective and sensitive encounter” (Schreiner 2006a). This encounter is focused on a free exchange of ideas and beliefs between students. This exchange is not subject to any restrictions: “In a safe classroom space, students are able to express their views openly, even if these might differ from those of their teacher or peers” (Sutinen, Kallioniemi and Pihlström 2015, 346). Differences in ideas and beliefs are to be explored in order to create mutual understanding on the one hand and to provide enrichment for personal identity development on the other (Ipgrave 2004). This encounter serves the ultimate goal of educating young people in order to prepare them to live in a plural society (Miedema and Ter Avest 2011).

Second, the equality of religious sources has to be advanced in religious education. When diversity is a feature of the student population, a multiplicity of sources are worth being explored by students (Boeve 2004; Vermeer 2004). In this way, the encounter in religious education is enriched by the plurality of student backgrounds as well as by the dialogue with several religious sources. This dialogue “may open up new horizons and enlarge the inclusiveness of a certain perspective” (Wardekker and Miedema 2001b, 77). This equality of sources in religious education means that in a classroom that features religious diversity, there is no dominant view.

These characteristics in the theory on diversity in religious education result in two perspectives: the social and a substantive. From these perspectives, we observe the praxis of the moment of contemplation in classrooms that encompass diverse religious backgrounds.

2.2. Social Perspective

The social perspective focuses on religious education as a way of stimulating dialogue in classes that show diversity. Dialogue is considered extremely important in religious education (Jackson 1997; Roebben 2002). The main objective of dialogue in religious education is facilitating the process of students’ identity formation (which is divided into two aspects: the expression of the self and the understanding of the other (Van Eersel, Hermans, and Slegers 2004; Jackson 1997).

This appreciation of dialogue has consequences for the role of the teacher and for how religious education is structured. Not only is the teacher required to possess “a commitment to an open and dialogical or “conversational” religious education” (Jackson 1997, 135), but the teacher is also no longer the expert who guides students towards answers. Rather, he becomes one of the participants and functions as a facilitator for the dialogue (Heimbrock 2009). The social perspective of dialogue calls for non-segregated classes: “My impression is that a multireligious (and intercultural) make-up of the classes provides the best preconditions with regard to dialogue and encounter in RE. A separation of the pupils according to confessions and religions would therefore no longer be desirable” (Weisse 2009, 124). Indeed, it is not the separation of students, but “cooperative learning” (Van der Zee, Hermans and Aarnoutse 2004, 82) that is a didactic and organisational consequence for religious education that stimulates dialogue.

2.3. *Substantive Perspective*

In heterogeneous settings, the role of religious traditions has changed: “Religious education has developed from transmission of knowledge related to the Christian tradition and the Bible into a transformative educational process (...)” (Ter Avest et al. 2008, 82). Two implications of this shift can be marked. First, the objective of religious education has changed: the “subjective religiosity of the student” (Van der Zee, Hermans and Aarnoutse 2004, 80) is the centre of identity formation. This means that the student actively participates in a hermeneutic practice by giving meaning to religious content in relation to personal existential questions (Van der Zee, Hermans and Aarnoutse 2004; Jackson 1997; Miedema 2000). The student is the centre of religious education processes; the ideas and beliefs of the teacher are no longer dominant content (Miedema 2000; Heimbrock 2009). Second, the content of religious education consists of a variety of perspectives that are explored by students and teacher together (Miedema 2000) and creates receptivity. This can be seen as the substantive core of religious education, which enables students to explore a variety of sources of meaning, and to encounter these differences (Wright 2004). In summary, in theory about religious education in heterogeneous settings, we see that no specific religious tradition or perspective plays a dominant role: diversity is regarded as an opportunity to create dialogue between students and a variety of sources. This dialogue and variety are key components in the identity formation of students.

3. *Single case study*

3.1. *Questions*

Based on our theoretical framework, we will examine how key values of a cooperation school and of its teachers are exerted in the ‘moment of contemplation’. We explore the following four questions to do so:

- a. What are the key values of the cooperation school in formal school documents concerning religious diversity?
- b. Which social didactics do we witness during the moment of contemplation?
- c. What religious content do we witness during the moment of contemplation?
- d. Which motives and values do teachers most appreciate in overall education and religious education at this cooperation school?

At cooperation schools, a secular view on religious school identity and on religious education meets a religious view (Renkema, Mulder and Barnard 2016). This is a specific phenomenon of diversity as it becomes visible in religious practices of the school. Instead of an encounter between different religious traditions, in cooperation schools a fusion of a secular and a religious world view is exerted in practice. The institutional policy of two schools with their specific identity and view on religious education are joined together in a new school. This is a school that defines its own identity in relation to the practice of religious education. This invites us to examine this practice: “The everyday reality of the teacher who works in a classroom composed of students from heterogenous religious backgrounds is the direct and most important motive to contemplate the question of how to deal with diversity” (Bakker 2004, 12). Our main interest is to investigate how we can describe the relationship between this moment of contemplation and key values stated in formal documents of the cooperation school and of its teachers. With this description we learn more about the way this specific institutional diversity is expressed in religious education.

3.2. *Sampling of the school*

In order to answer the aforementioned question, we conducted an instrumental case study (Stake 2005) at a cooperation school in the north of the Netherlands, situated in a rural area. It is the only school in the village. In the summer of 2012, the two existing schools (one public and one Protestant) merged to become the present one, which is attended by 115 students on average.

The largest group of students has no religious affiliation, and the students that do have a religious affiliation are almost all Christian.

There are eleven teachers and one principal, and there is a balance in the teachers’ backgrounds, including a combination of Protestant and public. School documents (also confirmed by the respondents in the interviews) indicate that all teachers are obliged to offer a moment of contemplation, every day, using the guideline entitled *Trefwoord* (§4.2.1). They are free to choose the time of the day for this moment. Besides this form of religious education, teachers and parents of the school organise festivities to celebrate Christmas or Easter for all students and teachers. We selected this school according to two criteria:

- The school organises collective religious education for all students, both the moment of contemplation and celebrations at Christmas and Easter. Before the summer of 2013, the moment of contemplation was segregated along the lines of the original school classifications (public and Protestant); it is still referenced as such in school documents. During the 2013-2014 school year, the moment of contemplation was integrated for all students together; according to the principal, students could learn more from each other that way and cooperation would be optimal. Since that time, the teachers have recently had to deal with new and increased diversity in their classrooms; religious and secular students meet.
- School documents mention equality and respect as key values of the school identity.

We regard this one school as representative for other cooperation schools that meet these two criteria: in our former research we detected these type of cooperation schools as the most dominant (Renkema, Mulder and Barnard 2016). This school shows us teachers' values and practices of religious education when a secular and a religious view on life and on education merge. We therefore investigate this case as a rich illustration of this type.

3.3. *Design*

Detailed information of one single case provides us with data about religious education in the context of diversity, in this case of a school that offers collective religious education. Examining how key school values are related to the practice of religious education, we compare this data with other cases in this context in our ongoing research about cooperation schools.

We conducted a qualitative study with multiple sources: the study of school documents and the lesson guide for religious education, the video recording and subsequent analysis of the moment of contemplation and the teacher interviews and subsequent analysis. The social and substantive perspectives were leading.

3.3.1. *School Documents*

The school guide outlines the formal educational policy (Mason 2002). There is a tension between the formal identity of Dutch schools and the religious diversity of their student population (Bakker and Rigg 2004). Therefore, we ask how key values as formulated in school documents are related to everyday practice: do we see this same tension in a cooperation school? We

were primarily interested in the following three topics: the vision on religious diversity in key values (social perspective), the vision on possible religious content in these values and the vision on possible religious content in religious education (substantive perspective). To verify that our analysis was up-to-date, we invited the principal to check our outcomes; he confirmed our conclusions.

3.3.2. *Videos of the Moment of Contemplation*

We recorded the moments of contemplation on video. For the analysis, we constructed an observation format. In this format, several aspects are specified under the following categories: time, physical space, participants, activities, sources, religious content. Before this formal analysis, we attended the moment of contemplation in three groups as an initial orientation. The aim was twofold: firstly, the teachers could familiarise themselves with the presence of a researcher in the classroom (and both students and teachers had the opportunity to ask questions). Secondly, attending this moment could provide us with information that might be significant for our research question, observations and interviews. Due to our findings during this orientation, we added the set-up of the classroom to our observation form: Do the participants sit in a circle, in groups or in rows? This item would provide us with information about the teacher's organisational choices, and whether the chosen set-up might stimulate dialogue.

We recorded the moment of contemplation in as ordinary a setting as possible in order to receive video data that illustrated the valid practice (Tuma, Schnettler, and Knoblauch 2013). To receive a reliable representation of the practice of the entire school, all classes were recorded during two days. We received a total of thirteen recordings from the seven classes. The camera was positioned in such a way that the actions of the teacher and the students were visible. In the subsequent interviews (§ 4.3), the teachers confirmed that the recorded moments of contemplation represent common quotidian practice.

In our analysis, we honoured the two perspectives: the social perspective was operationalised as 'the way the organisation of the classroom and didactics stimulate the dialogue between the participants'; the substantive perspective was operationalised as 'the content of religious sources and themes'.

3.3.3. *Interviews*

All teachers but one were subjected to a semi-structured interview in small groups. We used a topic list consisting of topics concerning the two perspectives (social and substantive). We focused on the teachers' values, the moment of contemplation, didactical choices and the school identity. In the analysis, we looked for specific social and substantive values, objectives and content.

All interviews were recorded, and lasted for about 80 minutes. For reasons of reliability, the researcher orally summarised the content in order to check whether it had been understood correctly. With the same objective, we submitted our main conclusions of the analysis to the respondents for a reliability test (Silverman 2006).

3.4. *Coding*

The interview transcriptions were analysed in a data-analysing computer program (QDA-miner) using the codes and sub-codes mentioned in Table 1. The coding of the interviews was done by Descriptive and Values Coding (Saldaña 2009). Descriptive Coding "summarises in a word or short phrase (...) the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data" (Saldaña 2009, 70). These topics are mentioned as codes in Table 1. Values Coding is: "the application of codes onto qualitative data that reflect a participant's values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing his or her perspectives or worldview" (Saldaña 2009, 89). Two sets of values codes were relevant for our research: personal and professional values of teachers. This allowed us to detect what motives guide teachers in structuring the moment of contemplation. All these codes and sub-codes tell us more about the appreciation of religious diversity and school values in the classroom by choices teachers make in the practice of religious education.

4. *Results*

4.1. *School Values*

In the school guide, four values are mentioned explicitly: respect, trust, openness and equality. These values are the basis on which the school operates, paying attention to both public and Protestant education: "the cooperation school offers both principles and is therefore generally accessible" (school guide 2012, 8). Referring to values of public education, this document mentions "principal equality of and respect for the religious background of parents, students and

teachers” (school guide 2012, 8). It is characteristic for Christian education at this school that the Bible is seen as the source of inspiration for co-existing with other people and the surrounding world. To this Christian value is added the note that “everyone’s input is respected” (school guide 2012, 8).

Another important aspect for our research is the formal attention paid to religious traditions. The sources on which school activities are based are Christianity as well as “other religious and societal convictions” (school guide 2012, 8). Except for the emphasisontheBibleas“mostimportantsourceofinspirationforChristianeducation” (school guide 2012, 8), there is no mentioning of a specific religious tradition. The school guide refers to one major objective of education related to our main point of interest, religious diversity: “In the curriculum, different backgrounds in terms of religion and life view will be taken into account. The school teaches students to appreciate these differences” (school guide 2012, 11).

When analysing this document from the social perspective, we see the appreciation of differences and of working and living together as explicit objectives of education. On the other hand, the school guide does not describe how these objectives can be realised. With regard to the substantive perspective, only the Christian tradition and the Bible are specifically mentioned in the document. However, it states that the different religious backgrounds are to be taken into account, and the equality of these backgrounds is stressed. Therefore, the substantive underlining of the Christian tradition and Christian education is remarkable.

4.2. *Analysis of the Moment of Contemplation*

We examined the *Trefwoord* guide before analysing the video data. Studying this guide in advance would also clarify whether it provides the teachers with content for the dates of our video recordings that are important for both our perspectives.

4.2.1. *The Lesson Guide*¹

Trefwoord is a method that is mostly used at Protestant and ecumenical schools for primary education. On its website, its objective is described: ‘To accompany and to support children in exploring, raising awareness and enriching their world’. The concept of ‘life orientation’ is mentioned. Three types of content mentioned in *Trefwoord* are important for our research,

¹ This information about *Trefwoord* is drawn from the website of this lesson guide: www.trefwoord.nl/verantwoording (accessed on 17 February 2015).

two based on a substantive perspective and one based on a social perspective:

First, with regard to the substantive perspective, the website mentions biblical stories. These stories are referred to as the source of these ‘pedagogically sound’ themes. Despite the fact that a variety of narrative sources is used, we can conclude that the Bible is the main source of religious education content and the themes in this education. *Trefwoord* suggests two biblical stories for the date of our video recordings: the story of the Ten Commandments and the story of the Golden Calf. For these dates, no other stories are suggested. This fact is also stressed by the respondents in the reliability test.

A second type of content from the substantive perspective is the themes that *Trefwoord* suggests to accompany the stories, so as to encourage the students to reflect on and question their own experiences, to develop critical thinking, and to incorporate these themes into their own lives.

For both dates on which we recorded, *Trefwoord* suggested life themes: on the first day the suggested theme was ‘class rules’ linked to the story of the Ten Commandments. For the second date, the theme is ‘group behaviour and peer pressure’, linked to the story of the Golden Calf. This is only suggested for 7-9 years and 10-12 years. For 4-6 years old, the theme about learning and practicing is suggested.

A third type of content is important for the social perspective. The school guide mentions that *Trefwoord* offers many options and themes “regarding social education” (school guide 2012, 56). When examining *Trefwoord*, we find that a variety of didactics are available. An example explicitly mentioned is didactics for cooperation. It is therefore interesting to see whether or not these didactics, and especially the cooperative ones, are used by the teachers. For both dates, the guide offers a suggestion for discussion about an illustration. Besides the biblical stories and group discussions, other narratives are suggested: for 4-6 years a poem, for 7-9 years and 10-12 years a song about the Ten Commandments, for 7-9 years also a song about the Golden Calf on the second date. Other didactics are suggested for 7-9 years and 10-12 years: a game in order to memorise the Ten Commandments and a didactic for cooperation.

4.2.2. *Analysis of the Video Recordings*

All moments of contemplation were situated in the classroom. The length of the moments ranges from 9 to 27 minutes. In all cases, the participants were the students of one single class and their teacher. In the youngest group of four- to five-year-old students, another teacher was present during each moment. During four moments, a student from a teacher training institute was observing. After analysis of the video data, no new results were detected. Four main findings manifest themselves when the videos are subjected to careful study.

In the first place, with regard to the social perspective, we paid attention to the classroom organisation: does the set-up of students and teacher stimulate dialogue? Results show that a majority of the students sit in a circle, together with the teacher. In three classes, students sit at their own table in small groups. In these classes, the teacher stands or sits in front of the class. Also, in three classes, students sit at their own table in rows of two to three next to each other. In one class, students sit at their own table in rows apart from each other.

A second, very dominant, finding of our analysis also concerns the social perspective: every moment of contemplation consists of a conversation between students and the teacher, where the teacher is clearly leading the conversation. Students follow the process. When one of the students responds to a question, the teacher does not invite students to interact. For example, the teacher of the 7-year-olds asks which skill the students needed to practice a lot (video recording 15-5-14, group 4). However, she does not encourage students to respond to individual answers. In another video, the students interact in small groups after the teacher has given the assignment to combine each of the Commandments with illustrations (video recording 13-5-14, group 8). This is the only moment of contemplation in which students interact.

In two other videos, the students spontaneously express religious remarks after closing statements of the teacher, in which the students are not actively involved. After the reading of the biblical story of the Golden Calf, one student from the group of 4- to 5-year-olds states that 'God is always close to us'. Another student mentions that 'God really exists' (video recording 15-5-14, group 1-2). The teacher acknowledges these remarks in one phrase. However, she does not stimulate dialogue about this issue by asking a question or encouraging other students to respond. The teacher leads the conversation, the teacher talks or reads, it is the teacher who

provides instructions. Hence, the teacher is the central figure. Except for once, no dialogue between students is encouraged.

A third finding of our analysis is the concentration on biblical stories. This is an important fact concerning the substantive perspective. Ten times, a biblical story is read by the teacher. Twice, a poem is read instead. On one occasion, there is no story (or other narrative) present at all. We see that teachers appeal to cognitive abilities of the students related to biblical content (knowledge of the Ten Commandments and the story of the previous moment of contemplation: the moment of contemplation recorded in group 6 on 15 May 2014 is an illustration). Here, we must add that on these specific dates *Trefwoord* also suggests these biblical stories, which seems to limit the options for the teachers. This limitation is stressed by the respondents in the reliability test. In this test, the respondents emphasised that the moments of contemplation do not contain biblical stories every day.

A final important finding regarding the substantive perspective is the focus on student experiences and values. In ten videos, these experiences are discussed. These themes are all suggested by *Trefwoord*. One example is the theme of trust and second chances related to the story of the Golden Calf (video recording 15-5-14, group 6). The teacher asks the students about their view on second chances: 'Sometimes mistakes are made, but is all lost then?'

We can summarise the analysis of the video data by stating that the moments of contemplation are characterised by a didactical emphasis on narratives (especially biblical narratives) and a question-and-answer exchange between teacher and a student. This implies an emphasis on a verbal presentation of religious content. These discussions are held between the teacher and one student at the time. Although the set-up of the classroom during a majority of the moments offers possibilities for dialogue, there is, in a majority of the videos, no dialogue between students.

4.3. *Analysis of the Interviews*

In the interviews, respondents indicate that the moment of contemplation is organised almost every day and at various times. Most respondents do not mention any social or religious motives for organising the moment at a specific time. One respondent indicates that she thinks it is 'a nice way to start the day together'

(Respondent B, interview 22-9-14).

From our coding results, we present values in personal life and in teaching (4.3.1) and objectives and content of the moment of contemplation (4.3.2).

4.3.1. *Values and School Identity*

All respondents answered questions about personal values, school values and teaching values.

1. Concerning personal values, respondents mentioned the importance of how people relate to each other. One of the respondents expresses herself as follows: 'What is important in life is that you love and that others love you, in a manner of speaking. That is very important to me. That you interact with other people in a decent and fun way.' (Respondent A, interview 22-9-14) In more tangible terms, how teachers deal with differences and respect is mentioned: 'That we just know that we are all different. And that differences are OK.' (Respondent B, interview 22-9-14) Two respondents answer by referring to the Bible as being important for their way of living.
2. With regard to school values, we also acknowledge this social focus. Respondents emphasise the appreciation of differences between students and between teachers: 'Respect is very important. Paying attention to each other as well. Because everyone probably has other things at home... So there are also differences.' (Respondents B and A, interview 23-9-14) Also, the social school value of 'working together' is underlined by respondents. Interestingly, two critical issues were added: one respondent has his doubts about how effective the appreciation of differences is in practice. 'We teach children to appreciate that [respecting differences, ER], but I wonder if that is really always the case; people still see things from their own perspective.' (Respondent A, interview 28-10-14) And another issue, based on the appreciation of togetherness: 'I would appreciate it if more attention and time were spent on being together and doing things together.' (Respondent C, interview 22-9-14)
3. The teaching values give us a clear insight into the respondents' goals for education. Teaching values and helping students develop a personal identity are seen as important. In the goals, the social perspective dominates: 'I think this is the basis for everything: simply to be able to interact well with each other, to listen to each other, to be able to talk to each other and to help each other.' (Respondent C, interview 22-9-14)

Summarising the results of the value coding, we can say that the social perspective is dominant. Respondents indicate that underlying values like respect, interacting with each other and appreciation of differences are endorsed by them personally and by school policy as well. Consequently, we can say that this social perspective is the unifying theme that links personal, school and teaching values. Here we must add that, although two respondents mention the importance of the Bible for their personal life, none of the respondents motivate these values by referring to a specific religious tradition. This is interesting, since the school guide mentions the Bible as a source of inspiration for co-existing with other people (school guide 2012).

4.3.2. *The Moment of Contemplation*

We discuss two main codes concerning the respondents' views on the moment of contemplation: its objectives and its content. Three objectives of the moment of contemplation can be recognised. A very important first objective within the substantive perspective is maintaining a focus on how the themes relate to students' lives. Respondents indicate that the moment of contemplation should encourage the exploration of an existential theme: 'That it [the theme, ER] really takes on significance.' (Respondent A, interview 28-10-14) A second objective, concerning the social perspective, is interaction. All respondents indicate that the exchange of personal perspectives and experiences is important: 'You teach each other, children learn to get to know each other better.' (Respondent A, interview 22-9-14) In every interview, the respondents state that the social dimension of the moment of contemplation is valuable. They indicate that the moment of contemplation is a great opportunity to stimulate team-building, respect and the appreciation of differences, especially by means of talking to each other. One respondent phrases it as follows: 'Learn to deal with each other, understand each other, so that everyone can be who he is (...)' (Respondent B, interview 23-9-14) Although talking as a way of interacting is highly valued by all respondents, in one interview all three respondents state that cooperation between students is strongly encouraged in education, but not during the moment of contemplation. A third, less dominant objective, and related to the substantive perspective, concerns the role of Christian tradition in the moment of contemplation. One of the respondents mentions 'conveying Christian faith' to the students as an objective (Respondent B, interview 28-10-14). Also, two respondents state that knowledge of biblical stories is important (Respondents A and B, interview 28-10-14).

With regard to content, we can distinguish three main findings, all related to the substantive perspective.

For one, almost none of the respondents prays with the students during the moment of contemplation. Two reasons are mentioned for not praying in class: four respondents viewed it as inconvenient because of their personal convictions: 'It would be the same if I were to paint while I'm not a painter at all. So when I pray not believing in God, I find that peculiar.' (Respondent B, interview 23-9-14) Two respondents say they want to pray with students, but in spite of their personal preferences, they do not, because they think it is school policy not to. As for religious objects, two respondents state that they light candles during the Advent period. They see this as an expression of Christian faith.

Our second issue is on the biblical content. The respondents indicate that biblical stories are told (or read) during the moment of contemplation. The suggestions in *Trefwoord* are leading in their choices. The respondents value this biblical content in the moment of contemplation. Also, in the reliability test, respondents confirm that this appreciation of the Christian tradition is important to the cooperation school. They identify the biblical content as an expression of Christian tradition: '*Trefwoord* works with the biblical stories; that's nice, since we are indeed a cooperation school with this background. A Christian background.' (Respondent B, interview 23-9-14). We can discern several motives for biblical content in the interviews. One of the main motives is the assignment to deliver general education in a cooperation school, especially the knowledge of 'basic stories' (Respondent C, interview 22-9-14) In addition, the illustration of an existential theme is a motive: 'I do not feel that when you are finished telling the biblical story (...) that you are done.' (Respondent A, interview 23-9-14) One respondent claims that the transfer of 'a very small piece' (Respondent B, interview 28-10-14) of Christian faith is her motive for telling the stories.

Our last issue is the respondent's views on the attention for diverse religions in religious education. In all interviews the respondents state a desire to pay more attention to various religious traditions. One respondent describes as her motive: 'I just think that when they [the students, ER] know that background a little, that they might deal with it better later on.' (Respondent C, interview 22-9-14) The respondents also mentioned that *Trefwoord* does not offer much material concerning other religions.

5. *Conclusions*

Examining how key values of a cooperation school and of its teachers are exerted in the moment of contemplation, we can draw five conclusions. First, with regard to the social perspective, we see that respondents and the school guide speak highly of the social objective of education, and of religious education in particular. The appreciation for working together, the respect for differences and the interaction in lessons are portrayed as central values of the cooperation school. A strong connection between the school values, personal and professional values of the respondents can be seen regarding this social objective.

A second conclusion concerning the social perspective is that there seems to be a discrepancy between the values of the respondents and the institutional identity based on school values on the one hand, and the implementation of dialogue on the other hand. Differences between students are not explored by the students, although the lesson guide does provide didactics for interaction. We observed interaction during this moment, but this almost always concerned a question-and-answer exchange between the teacher and one of the students. Three of the respondents endorse the observation that interaction between students is marginal. Not only is there a lack of interaction between students, but no other didactics are organised in order to stimulate social cohesion of students. The institutional policy of these schools concerning the diversity of secular and religious students and the social objective of education is not embodied in religious education.

With regard to the substantive perspective, we can draw a third conclusion: the data show that respondents value religious education that deals with themes of how the students view their lives. As a result, it is remarkable that the school guide does not refer to this specific objective of religious education. A fourth conclusion, also about the substantive perspective, concerns the presentation of Christian tradition. The selection of a lesson guide is crucial in the presentation of religious content. Explicit Christian acts or objects are presented marginally, although some respondents seem to experience ambivalence on this matter. However, Christian tradition is visible in the telling of biblical stories. In this context, all respondents value the presentation of biblical stories for different reasons. Although the video data show an emphasis on these stories,

respondents do not consider these to be exclusive religious material. This view of the respondents underlines the policy of the cooperation school, which stresses equality of convictions. Here we must add that, although biblical content in the moment of contemplation is valued by the respondents, a minority of them mention Christian tradition or the Bible as a significant source for their personal values. Our last conclusion is also related to the substantive perspective: the school guide mentions “other religious and societal convictions” (school guide 2012, 8) as the source on which school activities are founded. There seems to be a discrepancy between this principle and the practice of the moment of contemplation or any other education at this cooperation school. In the video recordings, no other religious or societal convictions than the Christian ones are presented. This absence is confirmed by the respondents: they would value more attention being paid to a variety of convictions. In the interviews, again, the selection of the lesson guide is seen as an important factor.

The analysis of the empirical data from this case study demonstrates that the social and the substantive perspective are helpful for examining the relationship between key values of cooperation schools and religious education. Through this approach, teachers and principals of cooperation schools may reflect on this relationship and the motives and possibilities for stimulating dialogue in the practice of religious diversity.

6. Discussion

6.1. Questions for religious education

Our conclusions raise new questions.

1. Theories of religious education (Jackson 1997; Roebben 2002) as well as the values expressed by respondents and outlined in school documents emphasise the importance of mutual understanding, collaboration and dialogue in the classroom. This empirical finding underlines results of our previous research, in which principals of these schools mention equality and mutual understanding as important values of their school identity (Renkema, Mulder and Barnard 2016). However, in video analysis of practices of religious education, these objectives are not visible in didactics that focus on religious dialogue. The religious diversity of the student population of a Dutch cooperation school can offer the challenge to implement good practices of

religious dialogue between students. Hence, we ask the question: How can good practices in classes that exhibit religious diversity be encouraged by emphasising didactics enabling religious dialogue?

2. Based on our conclusion that a discrepancy can be detected between the emphasis on Christian tradition in professional views and in educational practice on the one hand, and the formal identity of the school and personal beliefs of the teachers on the other hand, we could ask: Why and to what extent should religious content be recognisable in religious education and formal documents in a cooperation school? This question is underlined by theory on substantive religious diversity as an important factor for stimulating dialogue in religious education (Wright 2004).
3. Respondents value the attention for students' personal views on life which is provided in the context of religious education. This value is also stressed in theory about students' identity formation by giving meaning to religious content for personal existential questions (Miedema 2000). However, this theory emphasises a central role for the student in this process, a role that is hardly identifiable in video data. In other theory we see that religious education puts the teacher in the role of one of the participants and a facilitator of dialogue (Heimbrock 2009). Therefore we ask: Can discussions between teachers about professional and school values and these possibilities for expression be helpful in expressing a distinctive way for the school to handle religious diversity?
4. Teachers indicate in the interviews that they would value attention for a variety of religious traditions in educational practice. Also, the formal identity of the school mentions that, in addition to the Christian faith, "other religious and societal convictions" (school guide 2012, 8) are the source on which school activities are founded. These other convictions could not be detected in the recorded moments of contemplation. Hence we ask: Could school values of respect, dialogue and equality be expressed by paying attention to a diversity of religious traditions? Especially in the light of our theoretical notion that the content of religious education consists of a variety of perspectives that are explored by students and teacher (Wright 2004), this question needs emphasis.

6.2. Questions for further research

This single case study explores motives and practices of religious education for students from diverse religious backgrounds. The study is of interest because of the specific situation of the cooperation school: a school that is a result of a merger between a neutral school and a school with a religious affiliation deals with the interesting question of how to deal with religious diversity in light of these original backgrounds.

The answer to our question cannot be based on this single case. Other cooperation schools organise religious education in a segregated way (Renkema, Mulder and Barnard 2016). What motives and practices concerning diversity can we see when we study religious education at these schools? This approach allows us to explore a wide variety of aspects and gain an overall impression of religious education and diversity at these cooperation schools. Therefore, the results of this study will later be compared to results from other schools in future research.

A second question that originates from this research addresses the extent of the religious diversity of students at this one cooperation school. It has become clear that students are non-affiliated or have a Christian orientation. There are hardly any students with another affiliation. Therefore, we ask whether our further research can show practices of religious education and the way these practices deal with increased diversity. It must be noted here that the social context in which schools merge and become a cooperation school is in most cases a rural one; this limits religious diversity in the Netherlands.



CHAPTER 4

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND CELEBRATIONS IN A DUTCH COOPERATION SCHOOL

Abstract

In this article, the authors present the results of their research at four cooperation schools in the Netherlands. These schools are characterized by a specific religious diversity of their student population. Based on theory about religious education and diversity, the authors describe their empirical research on how teachers deal with such religious diversity in rituals: moments of contemplation and celebrations. This study focuses specifically on the expression of school values of encounter, equality of sources and the focus on students' life experiences in these rituals. This study is part of broader research regarding religious diversity in cooperation schools.

1. *Introduction*

Like the rest of society in the Netherlands, Dutch schools face increasing religious plurality in their student population (Hermans 2004). In classrooms, students from different religious backgrounds and world views meet. This plurality is seen as a challenge for religious education (Ipgrave 2004). Like every other institution, a school has “a mission, vision and policy of its own that are supported by certain values” (Mulder 2012, 37). We assume a connection between these values and everyday educational practice (Keast and Leganger-Krogstad 2006). Considering this, what can we say about the correlation between the school values on the one hand and the practice of religious education in the context of religious plurality on the other?

This plurality is particularly evident in Dutch cooperation schools, which are the product of a merger between secular public schools and religious nongovernment schools. The Dutch educational system is a pillarized one: a school is either a public or a nongovernment school. A public school is legally provided for by the government and is religiously neutral. Nongovernment schools are the result of private initiative of organizations and/or persons and are based upon a religious or philosophical orientation (Glenn and Zoontjens 2012). Several confessional denominations found schools that match their convictions. A recent development in Dutch education is the increase of the cooperation schools (Renkema, Mulder and Barnard 2016). Our previous research indicated plurality of the student population as a key characteristic of these schools. We investigated the core values of these schools, as well as motives and practices of religious education. Our focus was on religious education that was non-segregated, included all students, and maintained maximum religious diversity: in most cooperation schools non-affiliated and Christian. Our main conclusion was that there was a discrepancy between religious education and key school values of encounter and equality (Renkema, Mulder and Barnard 2017). This article looks at daily moments of contemplation that are segregated according to public education and confessional denominations and at celebrations that are organized for all students together. We have three reasons for this focus:

1. Until now, we have not explored religious celebrations as a form of religious education. Our focus was solely on the ‘moment of contemplation’:
a daily educational moment in which religious content is discussed and

contemplated (Renkema, Mulder and Barnard 2017). The focus on these celebrations may offer new strategies for dealing with religious plurality in education and may confirm and/or question previous results from our research on collective religious education.

2. In the way school identity is put into practice with regard to religious diversity, there seems to be a discrepancy between the segregation of students in the moment of contemplation and the collective celebration with all students. Can concurrent segregated and collective practice of religious education do justice to plurality and to school values?
3. Ritual theory states that rituals serve a social function, which may be important for expressing and enhancing the identity as expressed through core values of encounter and equality. The context of plurality at cooperation schools requires an examination of this function: Can we see a ritual like the collective celebration as an example of encounter and equality? Does this perspective provide motives for dealing with plurality in religious education?

We selected four cooperation primary schools, and concentrated on the segregated moment of contemplation and the collective religious celebration. We studied the motives and practices of the teachers by conducting questionnaires and interviews. Our results show what motives teachers present in order to deal with plurality in religious education and how these motives are identifiable in practice. These findings are of utmost importance for teachers and principals of schools who recognize this religious plurality and are searching for practices and perspectives on education that do justice to it. The results reveal a range of practices and motives for dealing with religious plurality in cooperation schools. But how do these practices and motives relate to each other and to the school values? What tensions and challenges do we recognize?

2. *Expressing school identity*

Our research examines how the identity of cooperation schools is expressed in religious educational practices. We consider the teacher to be an important actor in this process (Renkema, Mulder and Barnard 2017). This article focuses on the expression of key values in segregated moments of contemplation and collective

celebrations. In line with Henry, we regard these activities as rituals that express and enhance the school identity: “what the school stands for is evidenced in its expression through ritual” (Henry 1992, 306). In our research we investigate the social values of school identity, and relate them to encounter in religious education and the development of student’s identity. Therefore we define ritual in schools as educational practices in which values of community and belonging are expressed and the development of the student’s identity is fostered. Because of the emphasis on social values of cooperation schools and the social perspective of encounter in religious education theory, we elaborate on the communal aspect of ritual.

In ritual theory, the social function of a ritual is stressed by many scholars (Bell 1997). In the line of Durkheim’s view on religion as a way of fostering social cohesion, a ritual is interpreted as a means of “transcending the particular” (Bell 1997, 267). A functionalist approach on the social qualities of ritual should not be isolated from other approaches (Barnard and Wepener 2012). However, we focus on the quality of ritual that Grimes distinguished: “ritual generates and stimulates a sense of belonging and relationships of trust” (Barnard and Wepener 2012, 4). Similarly, Grimes stresses this quality, defining ritual as “an evanescent social event” (Grimes 2014, 242). We elaborate on the social dimension of these activities, viewing it as a way of forming or enacting communities. In this aim, we recognize core values of cooperation schools: equality, encounter, mutual understanding. The social dimension of educational practices is underlined by Wardekker and Miedema, who “formulate the aim of the school as enabling pupils to participate in socially and culturally structured practices that take place at a certain time and that are located within a particular societal setting” (2001b, 80). According to Henry, ritual is an educational practice with a social dimension: it helps schools “to form an educational community” (1992, 306).

At the schools in this study, the core values expressed and enhanced in rituals like the moments of contemplation and the celebrations are always related to a characteristic feature of a cooperation school: these schools are mainly attended by students from Christian and non-affiliated backgrounds. Given that fact, what are theoretical perspectives on expressing a characteristic school identity in religious education in plural settings?

3. *Religious education and plurality*

Religious plurality in education is valued for several reasons (Keast and Leganger-Krogstad 2006). This plurality can be addressed in religious education in three ways: classroom encounter, equality of sources and students' life experiences. We interpret these concepts as our focus points for addressing this plurality. We will demonstrate how theory about these concepts shows us how can be dealt with plurality in religious education.

3.1. *Classroom encounter*

Encounter is greatly appreciated in religious education in plural classrooms (Jackson 2004). Elias states that "at the heart of all humanistic forms of education is the dialogical encounter" (2010, 59). This encounter between students from different religious backgrounds is regarded as important for two specific reasons. First, encounter encourages students to form their own identities by reflecting on their personal points of view: "Through the challenge of 'unpacking' another worldview one can, in a sense, become a new person" (Jackson 1997, 130-131). It is the encounter that stimulates students to reflect on their personal views, values and beliefs. The other person with another point of view can add to this reflection (Elias, 2010).

The second reason for the appreciation of encounter in religious education is the development of respect for and understanding of the other: "RE lessons have an important role to play in diversified societies encouraging mutual respect, understanding, and shared common values among young people" (Jackson 1997, 130-131). Differences between students can stimulate an attitude of tolerance and openness (Elias 2010).

3.2. *Equality of sources*

Classroom encounter is strongly influenced by handling sources from different worldviews or religions equally. All sources for religious beliefs and worldviews are valued equally; fostering dialogue with a plurality of perspectives "may open up new horizons and enlarge the inclusiveness of a certain perspective" (Wardekker and Miedema 2001b, 77). Plurality in classroom is also made visible in the presentation of a plurality of sources. A variety of religious and secular traditions, and other sources that address existential themes, contribute to identity

development of the students. This way students are encouraged to relate to a variety of perceptions which fosters the substance of dialogue (Wardekker and Miedema 2001b). This also means that we enhance the possibility for students to identify with a source or view. This identification stimulates the dialogue in religious education by which students are involved personally. This means that the objective of religious education is no longer the transmission of one specific tradition or religious source: “In order to truly take account of plurality as a basis for integrative RE, any attempts to make particular religious traditions the general framework of integrative RE have to be avoided” (Alberts 2007, 357). Similarly, Sutinen et al. relate their disapproval of educating students in one specific religion to their critical view on separated classes which “is not very suitable for societies where one of the main problems is increasing social cohesion” (Sutinen, Kallioniemi and Pihlström 2015, 330).

3.3. *Students’ life experiences*

There is a correlation between student participation in plural religious education and the exploration of students’ personal experiences and views. The dialogue and encounter between students from different backgrounds are particularly enhanced when this exploration is encouraged: “Pedagogically, the more aware teachers are of beliefs and values embedded in the experience of students, the more they can take account of pupils’ concerns and can provide teaching and learning situations which are designed to foster communication between students from different backgrounds” (Jackson 2004, 108).

Indeed, plurality in classrooms can only be visible when due attention is paid to students’ personal views, beliefs, and life experiences. This is an important condition for addressing a plurality of views and for enhancing encounters. Encounter in plural settings is fostered when students meet in the dialogue about experiences that are recognizable for them all. No student is excluded as can be the case when attention is only paid to a religious tradition that is not identifiable for all students (Ghiloni 2011). This inclusion of life experiences is a central mission of schools in general: to enable students to develop as it comes to “their individual and social awareness, experiences, emotions, will, aptitudes, beliefs, values” (Schreiner 2006b, 38).

4. Case studies

4.1. Questions

Our main question is: How do teachers of cooperation schools express school values and their vision on encounter and dialogue in segregated moments of contemplation and in the organization and performance of a collective celebration? We explored this question from the perspective of our three theoretical concepts: classroom encounters, equality of sources in religious education, and students' life experiences. We collected data on religious education at cooperation schools in particular and schools featuring religious diversity in general.

4.2. Sampling of the schools

We wanted to select multiple cases to facilitate comparison. Based on our previous research, principals from eight cooperation schools showed interest in the follow-up study. We studied the online school documents of these schools to find out how the moments of contemplation and celebrations are currently organized. Four schools with segregated moments of contemplation and collective celebrations were selected.

The principals of these schools provided us with contact information for all teachers. Each principal also provided us the name of one key informant. This member of staff is a professional who is closely involved in preparing one of more celebrations at the school. In 3 of the 4 cases, it concerned the principal himself/herself.

4.3. Design

First the principals of the selected schools were informed about the study and requested to participate by letter. In a phone call, after two weeks, we elaborated on the research objectives and the role of the participants. We also double-checked the current practice of religious education concerning the moments of contemplation and the celebrations.

We conducted a qualitative study based on multiple sources: questionnaires for teachers, interviews with teachers and interviews with key informants. To increase reliability and validity, we tested the questionnaire and the topics of the two interviews with respondents from one school. As a result of this test, we adapted the topic list of the interview with the key informant. The other instruments

remained unchanged. Because of the fact that the instruments remained mainly the same, we used the data from this school of this test as genuine data.

For reliability reasons, we discussed our main conclusions from the analysis in a reliability test with the respondents at the end of our research.

4.3.1. *Questionnaire*

We sent the link to an online questionnaire to all teachers of the participating schools. No distinction was made in teachers who are responsible for the moments of contemplation according to public education and to Christian education. Next to this we provided them with information about the objectives of the research and the questionnaire. This questionnaire consisted of multiple open and closed questions and covered five main themes, related to the main theoretical concepts: objectives of religious education, diversity in religious education, encounter in religious education, motives for segregated religious education, motives for collective celebrations. The respondents were requested to answer the question within 2-3 weeks.

4.3.2. *Interviews with key informants*

We used the semi-structured interview (both with a key informant and the focus group) to gather information about the personal motives and values of the respondents that emerged from the questionnaires. These interviews focused on the celebration. In the interview with the key informant on preparing for the celebration, the main topics were: student involvement, attention for diversity, attention for objectives of the celebration, attention for students' life experiences, attention for personal views of the participants. The key informant was the teacher or principal who is responsible for the organization of school celebrations. She or he is the one who chairs meetings about this organization and convenes colleagues for this meetings. All interviews were recorded, and lasted between 13 and 23 minutes.

4.3.3. *Interviews in focus groups*

All teachers of the schools who had been responsible for organizing a recent celebration were subjected to an interview in small focus groups. Also the key informant was part of this group. Our aim was to explore what we can say about this ritual in the light of our theoretical concepts, addressing these topics:

- teachers' motives to participate
- appreciation of the process of preparing for the celebration
- appreciation of the composition of the organizing group
- appreciation of diversity in the organizing group
- appreciation of the use of religious sources
- appreciation of attention for students' life experiences
- appreciation of objectives of religious education
- appreciation of didactics
- students' appreciation
- points for improvement.

All interviews were recorded, and lasted between 32 and 48 minutes.

4.4. Analysis

Our content analysis of the data is divided into two parts. The first resulted in a (partly quantitative) inventory of facts that emerged from related questions in the questionnaire.

The second part, a thematic analysis by identifying main themes in the rest of the questionnaire and the interviews, was done by using QDA-miner for coding in two steps. In the first step, our three theoretical concepts were used to structure the data: classroom encounter, equality of sources in religious education, and students' life experiences. In the second step, we coded our data using an inductive approach: multiple codes were identified in the data and categorized. These categories and matching codes for all empirical sources are specified in thematic maps. We conducted Descriptive and Values Coding (Saldaña 2009) in the analysis of three questions in the questionnaires (Values Coding) and of the interviews (Descriptive and Values Coding). Each code was linked to a category. Descriptive Coding was used for pointing out what basic topics were characteristic for the data. Values Coding was used for determining how the practice of religious education and celebrations was valued by the teachers. The coding was done by the first author, while a reliability check was performed by the second author. A number of codes were added following the check, linked to the category of encounter.

5. Results

The general characteristics of the four schools, specified in Table 1 (Appendix A), are worth mentioning before presenting the results of our empirical study.

5.1 *Analysis of the questionnaire*

5.1.1. *Inventory of facts in the questionnaire*

24 respondents filled in the online questionnaire. The respondents self-identified as teachers who provide Christian religious education and as teachers who organize secular religious education.

We structured our main findings according to the following themes: diversity of student population, segregated religious education, objectives of religious education, and collective celebrations.

A. Diversity of student population

Religious plurality in the school population is recognized and interpreted in three ways: religious/non-religious, multiple religious traditions, and Protestant/non-Protestant. An overview of the answers is provided in Table 2 (Appendix A).

We must add that not all respondents interpreted the corresponding question the same way; some referred to their segregated religious education, others to the entire school population. As we see in Table 1, school 2 has a variety of religious traditions among their student population. It is this same school, the only of the four schools situated in an urban setting, where the respondents interpret plurality as a multitude of traditions. These respondents do not interpret this as a Protestant/non-Protestant dichotomy. All respondents value the openness and respect in addressing these religious differences between students and refer to one or more activities of religious education when asked in which activities these religious differences are expressed. The moment of contemplation as the start of the day (22 respondents) and the celebrations (17) are specifically mentioned.

B. Segregated religious education

Results concerning this topic are placed in the overview in Appendix B. Some distinctive findings are mentioned in Table 3 (Appendix A).

Clearly, parent preference is a dominant motivation for segregated religious education. Only the respondents from school 4 do not refer to this motivation. Respondents from 3 schools mention collective moments when students of Christian and of secular religious education meet. In the context of our concept of classroom encounter, this is an interesting finding;

respondents seem to indicate that such encounter often concerns the mutual exchange of content: “Then we often evaluate. What have you learned/done during public/religious education?” (respondent, questionnaire 19).

A few critical comments regarding segregated religious education are mentioned. Three respondents cannot provide a reason for this segregation. Some respondents indicate that this segregation prevents them from organizing an optimal encounter: “I understand that because of the separation you can explore subjects deeper, but I also think that it is important that children learn more from each other, from other religions, self-knowledge, standards and values” (respondent, questionnaire 19). However, others state that the segregation makes it possible to focus on Christianity, as illustrated by this quote: “This way it is possible to elaborate more on a subject” (respondent, questionnaire 9). No clear profile can be detected in public education. Respondents mention teaching about several religious traditions, as well as social subjects.

C. Objectives of religious education

The valuation of the prescribed objectives of religious education is mentioned in Table 4 (Appendix A).

Since a majority of the respondents indicate the ‘knowledge’ and the ‘understanding of religious traditions, present in our society’ as objectives of religious education, we can assume an appreciation for the plurality of religious sources. We can also see this appreciation when respondents put into words why they attach value to dialogue and encounter in religious education: equality of traditions is considered very important: “they [the students, ER] get to deal with different convictions later on in their lives. Talking about this and seeing things from different perspectives is, in this regard, very important” (respondent, questionnaire 22). However, in spite of the fact that dialogue and encounter are core values of cooperation schools, these are mentioned as objectives by no more than 50% of the respondents. It is noteworthy that both the knowledge of Christian culture and the transmission of Christian faith are stated. Only the respondents of school 1 do not mention the transmission of Christian faith as an objective. The correlation between the focus on plurality and these objectives is interesting to mention because of a possible resemblance or tension between this focus and the objectives mentioned in our data.

D. Collective celebrations

Results concerning this topic are placed in the overview in Appendix B. Collective celebrations are greatly appreciated: respondents of all schools regard them as powerful opportunities to enhance encounter and collectivity: in a collective celebration, we “meet each other and get to know each other better by dialogue and experiences” (respondent, questionnaire 23). We also see that these celebrations follow Christian tradition: there are no religious celebrations other than a Christmas celebration and an Easter celebration. The Christmas celebration at school 2 and 3 is conducted by students who receive Christian religious education. The students taking public religious education are very much welcome: they are spectators and do not contribute. However, respondents also indicate that these celebrations encourage students to familiarize themselves with differences and “each other’s culture” (respondent, questionnaire 13). Celebrations at school 1 and 4 are organized for and by all students together. This is also the case for the Easter celebration at school 3. During a celebration, it is considered important to mark the uniqueness of the different religious orientations in line with segregated education, informing the students of “both sides” (respondent, questionnaire 16) so that “everyone can recognize himself in the celebration” (respondent, questionnaire 16). We might interpret one respondent in this light: “we are a combination of a public and a protestant school” (respondent, questionnaire 14). The data do not reveal any celebrations in which the dialogue between all students and the exploration of life experiences by all students are stimulated.

5.1.2. *Thematic analysis of the questionnaire*

When elaborating on their perspective on dealing with religious differences in classrooms all respondents bring up school values like respect, equality and mutual understanding. To illustrate: one of the respondents writes that she considers it important “that everyone can have and express his opinion, without having or giving the feeling that the idea of someone else is wrong” (respondent, questionnaire 12). Differences between beliefs and views are opportunities to meet each other and to create respect and understanding. When asked how dialogue and encounter are valued in religious education, one respondent from school 3 and one from school 4 mention that dialogue and encounter are restricted because of the segregated moments of contemplation. This Values Coding shows that our theoretical concepts of encounter and the

equality of sources are very much appreciated as core values of a cooperation school that deals with religious differences. However, when asked what value is attached to differences and to encounter, our third concept – attention for life experiences – is hardly presented in the questionnaire, or not at all.

5.2. *Analysis of the interviews*

5.2.1. *Interviews with key informants*

The first part of the interviews with the key informants focused on preparing for the school celebrations. Descriptive Coding of these interviews leads us to three findings. First, all respondents indicate that the organization committee consists exclusively of teachers: no students (or parents) are involved in the substantive reflection preceding the celebration. Or, as one of the respondents formulates: “they [the students, ER] have been involved in the performing, the preparation, but they were not asked how we are going to do things” (respondent, school 2).

Second: respondents appreciate the celebration being comprehensible for students. They also find it important for students to be actively involved during the celebration. Both items are discussed during the preparation sessions. They do not discuss a possible focus on the students’ life experiences in the celebration.

Third, respondents indicate that no limits are set for teachers participating in the organization committee. The respondent from school 2 indicates that the Christmas celebration is only organized by teachers who are responsible for Christian religious education: teachers of secular religious education are very much welcome, but do not participate. Values Coding revealed that all respondents appreciate the participation of teachers of all religious backgrounds because of the diversity and dialogue. Or, as the respondent from school 4 formulates: “I value that we thoroughly discuss opinions on one issue or another” (respondent, school 4).

5.2.2. *Interviews with the organization committee*

The analysis of the interviews with the teachers who were responsible for organizing a religious celebration provides five findings. First, conducting Descriptive Coding, we see that the composition of the organizing committee differs, as we saw in the analysis of the interviews with the key informants (see Table 5, Appendix A).

School 1 and 4 organize all celebrations with teachers from different religious backgrounds. This implies that teachers who teach Christian education as well as teachers who teach public education contribute to the substantive realization of the celebration. The organization committee at school 2 consists of teachers who provide segregated Christian education. The choice is motivated by referring to the dominant Christian tradition: “there are no teachers of public education because it is primarily a Christian celebration” (respondent, school 2). At school 3, the composition differs depending on the celebration. Our second finding corresponds to our analysis of the questionnaires: the celebration is interpreted as an activity expressing encounter and group identity. We see a strong relationship between the school value of encounter and the celebration. One key informant formulates this perspective as follows: “There is one activity one has to do together, which is the celebration, for there the encounter takes place and there interactional learning takes place” (respondent, school 1).

The third finding is closely related to the second. The aspect of dialogue in this being together, this encounter, during the celebration is marginal. The students present their contributions, individually or as a (small) group to each other. However, the dialogue about life experiences takes place in the preparatory lessons “prior to [the celebration, ER] in class and then we talk about a lot of things, including the Christian stories and then in class together with the children of the public identity, but there is no dialogue during the celebration” (respondent, school 1).

Our next finding concentrates on the attention for differences in the celebration. Although differences are hardly explored by dialogue, what perspective on differences is expressed in the interviews? For a better understanding of the student population participating, we first provide an overview in Table 6 (Appendix A).

The respondents from school 1, 3 and 4 value a celebration where “both identities” (respondent, school 1) are expressed. Apparently, in these schools, differences are interpreted as such according to supposed convictions of the segregated denominations: Christian education or public education. According to one of the team members, this interpretation results in a focus on secular sources alongside the Christian sources for the celebration: “when we would only use a biblical story, we would have no concern for the existing differences” (respondent, school 3). Another interpretation of differences and the focus on them is a pedagogical

one: when children prefer not to take active part, for example, “they do technical things” (respondent, school 4): e.g. preparing objects.

School 2 has a Christian focus and does not express religious diversity. Although the celebration is open for all students, it is mainly attended by students of the Christian segregated religious classes and the content is based upon the Christian tradition. The respondents indicate that the celebration is organized from “a Christian perspective” (respondent, school 2). The celebration is called a “service” (respondent, school 2).

Our last finding relates to our theoretical concept of the equality of sources. Our analysis shows that all schools organize a Christmas celebration. School 3 organizes a second Christmas celebration for and by students of Christian religious education; students of public religious education are welcome but do not participate. This celebration resembles the one organized by school 2. An Easter celebration is also organized in school 1 and 3. Biblical stories are the core content in all these celebrations, especially in the contributions by students of Christian segregated education. Respondents from school 1, 2 and 4 mention that the attention for these biblical stories is important for all students because of the cultural relevance of the Bible. The analysis that school celebrations follow Christian tradition underlines our finding concerning the questionnaire and is illustrated by this interview quote: “I think that in a Christmas celebration the emphasis is a little more on the Christian side, because it is a Christian feast” (respondent, school 4). A respondent from school 4 indicates that the attention for the biblical story results in marginal attention for students’ life experiences, if any.

6. *Conclusions*

We answer the main question about the ways teachers of cooperation schools express school values and their views on encounter and dialogue in segregated moments of contemplation and in the organization and performance of a collective celebration by drawing six conclusions, following our three theoretical concepts: classroom encounter, equality of sources in RE and students’ life experiences. First, we formulate three conclusions concerning the concept of encounter.

- A. We see that encounter in religious education is highly valued by the respondents. In segregated religious education as well as in the collective celebration, they endorse this core value of a cooperation school. The appreciation is a significant and common thread in this and our previous research (Renkema, Mulder and Barnard 2016). The celebrations especially are regarded as opportunities to realize encounter between students. The appreciation matches the theoretical emphasis on encounter in religious education (Jackson 2004). The emphasis on encounter as a key value of religious activities in education is in line with the definition of ritual as described in section 2. Moments of encounter between students from non-affiliated and Christian backgrounds meet the communal aspect of this definition, in our focus on this quality of generating and stimulating “a sense of belonging and relationships of trust” (Barnard and Wepener 2012, 4). Empirical data show that three of the four schools have this opportunity for encounter because of the maximum religious diversity in the student population during a celebration.
- B. In spite of the appreciation of the social dimension, encounter and dialogue are mentioned by no more than fifty percent of the respondents in the questionnaire when asked to state objectives of religious education. This relatively low number is remarkable considering the endorsed school values of respect, mutual understanding and equality and the role of encounter in religious education according to theory.
- C. In addition, hardly any dialogue is visible during the celebration. Like the moment of contemplation in our previous research (Renkema, Mulder and Barnard 2017), teachers do not practice any dialogical didactics to stimulate the encounter. The expression of the social quality of the celebration as a ritual by means of dialogue between students of different religious backgrounds is limited. The sense of belonging and the social cohesion in a ritual is expressed in other ways than by didactics of dialogue: for example by singing together or sharing performances on stage. This dialogue is also limited because no students are involved in the organizing committee. In the collective celebration, students present an aspect in line with the segregated denominations in order to get to know each other’s background. We conclude that in these cooperation schools dialogue between students is

hardly put into practice: encounter is limited to divided groups in segregated religious education and the didactics of a celebration do not show any dialogue. A minority of the respondents stated their desire to organize collective moments of contemplation, because it is supposed to offer more opportunities for encounter. Almost all of them belong to school 4. Concerning our second concept, equality of sources, we formulate two conclusions.

- D. Contrary to the fact that a majority of the respondents mention the knowledge and/or understanding of plurality of traditions as an objective of religious education and contrary to the theoretical perspective endorsing equality, our empirical data show an emphasis on Christian tradition in religious education. First, we see a clear focus on Christian tradition in segregated religious education. Reasons provided included parent preferences and a statement that segregating allowed for more in-depth exploration. We also recognize this emphasis in the school celebrations. Celebrations that aim to foster students' religious development are organized at Christmas and Easter, highlighting Christian tradition which respondents describe as important.

- E. The concept of equality is also seen in the fact that the segregated denominations are explicitly visible in the celebration: 'the Christian identity' as well as 'the public identity' are presented equally. The celebration at school 2 and one of the celebrations at school 3 differ from this conclusion; these celebrations are explicitly a Christian celebration. However, in all celebrations, content of the Christian tradition is an important aspect or a basis.
Concerning our third concept, the attention for students' life experiences, we formulate our final conclusion. It addresses our theoretical perspective that the attention for students' life experiences in religious education is a key aspect of encounter (Jackson 2004).

- F. Our data show that this attention is marginal during the celebrations; it mainly occurs in classes preceding the celebration. This means that the dialogue on students' life experiences is primarily organized in educational settings where religious diversity is limited because of segregated education. In settings where this diversity is maximized (e.g. celebrations), the exploration of life experiences is restricted.

Summarizing the conclusions about our three concepts, we see a tension between underlining of school values and the appreciation of encounter and dialogue by the respondents of cooperation schools on the one hand and rituals of religious education on the other hand. In theory, these rituals express and enhance school identity, but values of encounter and equality are restricted in these practices.

7. Discussion

7.1. Questions for religious education

We can ask four questions about this tension. First, according to the respondents, these values are expressed and enhanced in the collective celebration for all students. In their vision, there is a strong connection between this celebration and the school values. Although data from the questionnaires also indicate that the segregated religious education can have the same objective, such education is also regarded by the respondents as important for teaching a segregated denominational perspective (mostly Christian). Consequently, we ask: can activities for religious education in schools that feature religious diversity differ in their objectives and in expressing school values?

Our second question is in line with our previous research about dialogical didactics in religious education (Renkema, Mulder and Barnard 2017). In religious education at our participating schools, encounter is limited. This can be explained by the absence of social didactics in celebrations, by the absence of students contributing to the preparation and by the organization of the moments of contemplation in line with the segregated denominations. Therefore, we ask what social didactics can be created for organizing and preparing for collective celebrations in cooperation schools that enhance the expression of encounter between students. Thirdly, we indicated attention for the students' life experiences as an important contribution to the expression of a core value of a cooperation school. This attention is hardly visible in celebrations. In addition, although the 'development of a personal religious identity of the student' is seen as an objective by many respondents, this objective is not stated in their motives for paying attention to dialogue and encounter in religious education. Therefore, we ask: can this theoretical focus and encounter as a school value be expressed in celebrations at cooperation schools by paying more attention to students' life experiences? Our fourth question concerns the equality of religious sources. There seems to be a

discrepancy between the theoretical perspective on this school value and the practice of religious education. This leads us to our last question: how can the value of equality be interpreted when teachers strive for the inclusion of the equality of sources in interpreting this school value, and what is the significance of the Christian tradition in religious education at a cooperation school in this inclusive interpretation?

7.2. Questions for further research

In our data, respondents from school 1, 2 and 3 mentioned collective moments when students of Christian and of secular religious education meet. These moments are organized in addition to the segregated moments of contemplation and the celebrations and are regarded as moments to exchange content from the segregated religious education. In the light of our emphasis on the core values of cooperation schools and on our three concepts, these moments are interesting: could we work with teachers to create activities for religious education that try to answer the aforementioned questions and that implement school values of encounter and equality? In line with this question, it is important to evaluate these activities with the participating teachers and study their perspective on the values in the light of theoretical perspectives on diversity in religious education.

Appendix A

Table 1. General characteristics of the schools

	School 1	School 2	School 3	School 4
Original denominations	Public-Protestant	Public-Protestant	Public-Protestant	Public-Protestant
Number of students	140	450	155	53
Total number of respondents: questionnaire	3	12	5	4
Number of respondents: focus interview	3	4	3	3
Job title of key informant	Principal	Teacher	Principal	Principal
Organized religious celebrations	Christmas, Easter	Christmas	Christmas, Easter	Christmas
Composition of student population	Christian/non-affiliated/ small number of Muslims	Christian/non-affiliated/ Muslim/ Buddhist/ Hindu	Christian/non-affiliated/ small number of Muslims	Christian/non-affiliated

Table 2. Interpretations of religious plurality

School	Interpretation	Number of respondents
1	religious/non-religious	2
	multiple religious traditions	0
	Protestant/non-Protestant	0
2	religious/non-religious	4
	multiple religious traditions	8
	Protestant/non-Protestant	0
3	religious/non-religious	1
	multiple religious traditions	0
	Protestant/non-Protestant	3
4	religious/non-religious	0
	multiple religious traditions	0
	Protestant/non-Protestant	4

Table 3. Results concerning segregated religious education

Outcome of the questionnaire	School	Number of respondents
<i>Parent preferences as motivation for segregated religious education</i>	1	3
	2	3
	3	2
<i>Presence of collective moments of religious education</i>	1	
	2	
	3	
<i>No reason mentioned for segregated religious education</i>	2	1
	4	2
<i>Segregated religious education as an option to pay attention to Christianity</i>	2	
	3	
<i>Segregated religious education as a way of doing justice to religious differences</i>	2	2

Table 4. Objectives of religious education

Objective of religious education	School 1 N=3	School 2 N=12	School 3 N=5	School 4 N=4
<i>To know religious traditions present in society</i>	2	11	5	2
<i>To understand religious traditions present in society</i>	2	9	4	3
<i>To develop a personal religious identity of the student</i>	3	5	4	2
<i>To practice dialogue and encounter</i>	1	5	5	1
<i>To know Christian culture</i>	1	5	2	1
<i>Transmission of Christian faith</i>		4	1	1
<i>Other objectives, each formulated by one respondent:</i>		1 to transfer general applicable standards and values 1 respondent mentions: I don't teach religious education	1 to have respect for other views/beliefs	

Table 5. *Composition of the organizing committee*

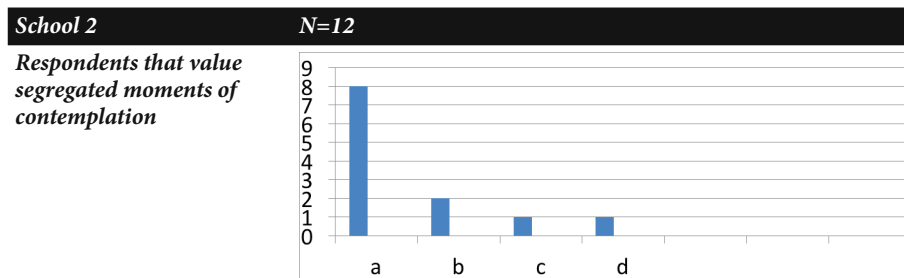
	<i>School 1</i>	<i>School 2</i>	<i>School 3</i>	<i>School 4</i>
Composition of organizing committee for celebration	<i>All teachers, with a specific role of the denominational external Christian teacher</i>	<i>Selection of teachers: all Christian RE</i>	<i>Easter: all teachers</i> <i>Christmas: teachers of Christian RE</i> <i>Christmas festival: all teachers</i>	<i>Selection of teachers: multiple religious affiliations</i>

Table 6. *Participants in the celebrations*

	<i>School 1</i>	<i>School 2</i>	<i>School 3</i>	<i>School 4</i>
Who participates in the celebration?	<i>All students</i>	<i>Students of Christian religious education; students of public RE are welcome.</i>	<i>- Christmas: students of Christian religious education; students of public RE are welcome</i> <i>- Christmas festival: all students</i> <i>- Easter: all students</i>	<i>All students</i>

Appendix B

School 1	N=3
Number of respondents that value segregated moments of contemplation	3
Motives for segregated moments of contemplation	Formulated by all respondents: It corresponds to parent preferences.
Reasons for collective celebrations	- we have shared values and vision on being human N=1 - the children get to know the story behind the celebration of Christmas and Easter N=1 - children and parents think it's good N=1
Number of respondents that value collective celebrations	32



a = I value the choice for segregated moments of contemplation

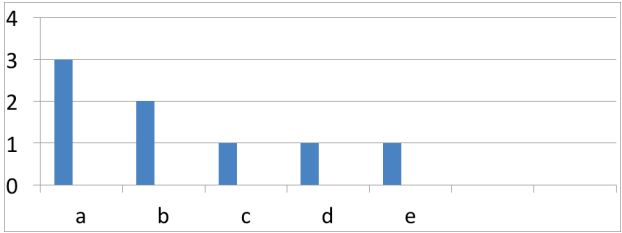
b = no valuation is mentioned

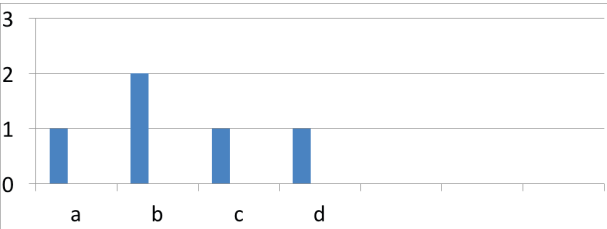
c = both positive as negative valuation

d = wrong interpretation of the question

Motives for segregated moments of contemplation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the teacher knows and understands the biblical stories: this is a condition for quality - enrichment which parents can choose - freedom of choice for parents - started by the standard of lifting - way of showing respect: students of different beliefs can visit one school perfectly - no reason - the Christian children can have a feeling of believing together - the children will get more knowledge of the biblical stories - we may not ignore a conscious choice for protestant education - we don't impose something on someone else: in life you have a choice - do justice to the choice of the parents - transfer of Christian faith - transfer of knowledge regarding Christian faith - deepening - more commitment - facilitate gaining knowledge of personal choice
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School 2	N=12
Reasons for collective celebrations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - different colors make the feast even more beautiful - togetherness - experience together - general development - respect for each other's culture - in line with the society in which we live: living in peace together - general development: knowledge of what feasts are celebrated - unity together - understanding and respect for each other - facilitate gaining knowledge of each other's culture: understanding for each other - unity and sharing - respect for each other's conviction and knowledge of this - celebrating together brings people closer - encouraging an atmosphere of togetherness; no being apart - meet each other and dialogue: getting to understand each other better - organizational - with each other and in dialogue
Respondents that value collective celebrations	11 1 respondent does not formulate a valuation

School 3	N=5												
Respondents that value segregated moments of contemplation	5												
Motives for segregated moments of contemplation	 <table border="1"> <caption>Data for Motives for segregated moments of contemplation</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Motive</th> <th>Count</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>a</td> <td>3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>b</td> <td>2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>c</td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>d</td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>e</td> <td>1</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p> a = recognition of specific and familiar experience and deepening specific tradition b = it corresponds to parent preferences c = more focus in transfer of knowledge d = we preserve two identities that learn from each other and work together e = we don't impose on the student something he doesn't support </p>	Motive	Count	a	3	b	2	c	1	d	1	e	1
Motive	Count												
a	3												
b	2												
c	1												
d	1												
e	1												
Reasons for collective celebrations	Encounter between different convictions and getting to know, value and respect these convictions N=5												
Respondents that value collective celebrations	5												

School 4	N=4										
Respondents that value segregated moments of contemplation	1										
Motives for segregated moments of contemplation	 <table border="1"> <caption>Data for Motives for segregated moments of contemplation</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Motive</th> <th>Count</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>a</td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>b</td> <td>2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>c</td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>d</td> <td>1</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p> <i>a = it suits the background and conviction of the specific teachers</i> <i>b = it is a tradition</i> <i>c = no reason</i> <i>d = I've experienced resistance when I organized the moments collectively</i> </p>	Motive	Count	a	1	b	2	c	1	d	1
Motive	Count										
a	1										
b	2										
c	1										
d	1										
Reasons for collective celebrations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - learning with and from each other, respect for and genuine interest in each other's belief N=1 - we don't have to organize the celebration on December 25th N=1 - respect for each other, mutual understanding N=1 										
Respondents that value collective celebrations	3 1 respondent does not formulate a valuation										



CHAPTER 5

DIALOGUE IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
AT A DUTCH COOPERATION SCHOOL.
A PILOT STUDY

Abstract

Dutch cooperation schools are populated by students from non-affiliated backgrounds and from Christian backgrounds. Previous research detected a discrepancy between the value of encounter pursued by a cooperation school and the limited practice of dialogue in religious education at the same school.

In a participatory action research context, teachers designed a new kind of celebration to enhance the practice of encounter. The result of this single case study was that teachers recognized core values of their school identity in this activity. An outsider researcher's perspective based on theory on encounter and dialogue leads to the conclusion that not all possibilities to improve congruency between school values and lived educational practice are utilized.

1. Context and problem definition

The students sit together in small groups, facing each other in circles. They talk about the questions that are asked by the teacher. One of the older students leads the discussion in every group. The four teachers walk around, listen and sometimes encourage them by summarizing or asking a new question. A few minutes before, the students listened to a poem, read aloud by one of the teachers.

This short scene is part of a new educational practice that is designed by the teachers. It is an experiment that tried to foster dialogue between all students from Christian backgrounds and from other backgrounds. Looking at the school values embraced by the school, the value of encounter presents a real challenge to the teachers when they offer religious education.

The students and teachers are not accustomed to dialogical religious education at their school. This school is a cooperation school: a school that was created by a merger between a confessional school and a public school. The first has religious affiliations, while the second is neutral and actively multiform (Ter Avest et al. 2007). In our research about primary schools, it appears that the merging confessional schools are almost always Christian: either Protestant or Roman Catholic. Due to the rural location of most of these schools, students are almost always non-affiliated or Christian. This plurality presents a challenge to teachers and students: they are invited to handle differences in a constructive way that fosters the development of their personal identity and their sense of openness and curiosity (Wardekker and Miedema 2001a).

Facing this unique kind of plurality in the classroom, participants (teachers and principals) from these primary schools mention equality and encounter as their core school values (Renkema, Mulder and Barnard 2016). They underline the importance that students meet differing views and gain respect and understanding for other perspectives. The participants from our previous research emphasized these values not only as a school characteristic, but also as their personal and professional values. Equality and encounter characterize a cooperation school as well as teachers' professional motives (Renkema, Mulder and Barnard 2017, 2018). We detected a discrepancy between school values on the one side and the practice of religious education on the other. In particular, the value of encounter was not

fully expressed due to two limitations (Renkema, Mulder and Barnard 2017, 2018):

First, almost all cooperation schools organize moments of contemplation as a practice of religious education (Renkema, Mulder and Barnard 2017). These are daily moments in which religious themes are presented. However, in a majority of these schools, the value of encounter seems to be defined to a very limited extent in this practice. Students are divided into denominational groups: a moment for students in line with Christian tradition, scheduled simultaneously with a moment that has non-affiliated, secular content. This form of segregation is based on the choice that the students or their parents make: do they want to receive religious education from a Christian point of view, or do they prefer non-affiliated education? Not all students from Christian education have a Christian background; similarly, not all students from non-affiliated education are secular. However, students are divided along the lines of their pre-merger schools, which limits the possibility of an encounter between children from different backgrounds. A majority of cooperation schools preserve the distinction between the (confessional and secular) divisions in both policy and practice of religious education. This retention counteracts the school value of encounter that is embraced by all participants: “Mutual recognition of each other’s existence among different groups is difficult if religious education is divided according to denominations and religions. Such a structure leads instead to a situation in which only one’s own rights and one’s own background are considered” (Weisse 2003, 205).

Second, dialogue shapes a practice that fosters encounter. Unfortunately, we found that dialogue is hardly practiced in religious education. We examined concrete moments of contemplation and found that students were not encouraged to exchange their views on religious subjects. Although some schools organize collective religious celebrations for larger groups of students, in which they are not divided into denominational groups, participants mention that they hardly organize any dialogical didactics in these celebrations (Renkema, Mulder and Barnard 2017, 2018). In the light of theory about encounter in religious education and of the views of participants, we see this discrepancy as a problem that cooperation schools need to respond to.

2. *Dialogue in religious education*

We have two reasons to underline dialogue as a key aspect of religious education. First, dialogue teaches students to handle plurality as present in the classroom and in society (Keaten and Soukup 2009; Leganger-Krogstad 2003). Through dialogue, students from different backgrounds meet. “Religious education is thus a conversational process in which students, whether from ‘secular’ or ‘religious’ backgrounds, continuously interpret and reinterpret their own views in the light of their studies” (Jackson 2004, 18). Dialogue stimulates the student’s attitude of equality, trust and respect in encountering others, building bridges between people of diverse religious perspectives (Miedema and Ter Avest 2011): “Dialogue across religious differences may foster our capacities to listen to others with both patience and tolerance” (Elias 2010, 70). By organizing dialogue in religious education, teachers foster the students’ attitude of openness and understanding and therefore contribute to a way of living together based on a sense of equality and trust (Keaten and Soukup 2009).

A second reason for dialogue is the development of the student’s identity. By practicing dialogue, the student reflects on his personal views and convictions in the exchange with others who hold differing views and convictions (Roebben 2000; Elias 2010; Orteza Y Miranda 2010). Students engage in dialogue with particular views, prejudices and sacred beliefs; they should be encouraged to share and negotiate them in these conversations. When students are taught to participate with “the sensitivity to tread carefully when dealing with religious issues” (Moyaert 2018, 5) and with “the willingness to understand the other in his or her otherness” (Moyaert 2018, 4), dialogue contributes to the formation of their self-understanding. For this objective, the students must be encouraged to communicate about their personal experiences and convictions (Moyaert 2018; Keaten and Soukup 2009). These two reasons for implementing dialogue in religious education shed light on the educational mission of schools. Schools are communities in which students (and teachers) live together and are challenged to understand and trust each other. These communities can be seen as transformative communities, which help students to construct and reconstruct their personal identity and understanding of life (Miedema 2009).

3. *Research question*

In our previous research, the teachers involved recognized the limitations in the practice of dialogue as an expression of the school value of encounter (Renkema, Mulder and Barnard 2018). Their challenge is to shape a new practice of religious education that offers a direction for resolving the discrepancy between school values and the lived practice. In this new practice, the characteristics of dialogue mentioned in the previous section should play an important role.

We designed a research context in which a new way of dealing with the discrepancy could be created in the form of an experiment. The resulting educational practice could tell us more about the motivation for and content of religious activities involving plurality and dialogue. In a participatory action research process that was intended to lead to the experiment, we intentionally and repeatedly introduced the concept of dialogue to reflect on. By doing so, we clearly showed how this concept is interpreted and developed by the teachers. The main question of the participatory action research was:

What are the teachers' motives for pursuing an experimental celebration at a cooperation school, what concepts and design requirements are involved, and how can this celebration be evaluated from a theory of dialogue and from the teachers' perspective?

4. *Research group: The school*

To conduct our research, we needed a "typical case" (Gray 2013, 217/218) that could meet three criteria, as follows:

1. The school is the result of a merger between a confessional school and a public school;
2. The school organizes segregated moments of contemplation, thus creating a discrepancy between this practice and our objective of a collective practice for all students;
3. Teachers are motivated to participate in an action research process that seeks to improve the alignment between school values and educational practice.

The teachers of the school that was chosen faced the challenge of designing and implementing a dialogical practice while having little or no experience with dialogue between students from non-affiliated education as well as Christian education. They always have segregated moments of contemplation and the collective celebrations consist of presentations without interaction about religious subjects (Renkema, Mulder and Barnard 2018). At the end of every week, students from both general and Christian education present to each other what they have learned that week. The school calls this a celebration. In the context of the research question, we chose to design a new kind of celebration in which dialogue was implemented. The teachers involved chose to create this new practice for their students aged 8-12 years old. The school is the result of a merger between a public school and a Protestant school in 1995. In 1993, four taskforces were created to develop the profile of the new school. One of the taskforces was concerned with identity and religious values. This taskforce described her objective concerning religious education as the aim to “find/have/attain a coherent whole of religious education in which encounter will be central” (RCICS 1993, Attachment 4, 3). This meant that themes for religious education have to be worked out from the perspectives of all religious backgrounds.

Currently, students are either non-affiliated or Protestant. A small minority of the students are Muslim or Roman Catholic. The importance of the encounter between these students and the focus on diversity are stressed in the school board's policies. The board's mission statement says that the school respects differences and that encounter takes place between children from different backgrounds. The policy of the board also relates this value of encounter to the societal mission of education as it comes to paying active attention to diversity of and active citizenship by the students. The school's history, the school board's mission statement, the school website and the school guide outline its vision for religious education, expressing the school identity as an “encounter school”: “a school where teachers, students, parents from various religious backgrounds work together and have joint responsibility for education and upbringing” (school guide 2014-2018, 4).

To guarantee the school's identity and preserve its principles, a permanent committee was established in 2001 comprising four parents (two from the non-affiliated, public orientation and two from the Christian orientation) and two teachers (one from each orientation). The regulations of this committee state four principles of the school identity:

- a.** the school is accessible to students from all denominations;
- b.** encounter fosters the formation of the student's identity while guaranteeing religious education;
- c.** discrimination is excluded;
- d.** Christian religious education is offered in compliance with principles of Protestant churches and is offered in such a way that parents can identify with these principles.

We see the focus on diversity in the admissions policy and the value of encounter expressed in these principles.

Focusing on values of religious education, the school guide specifies that "in our education, encounter takes place between children from various backgrounds" (school guide 2014-2018, 4). Parents can choose between two types of religious education: Christian and general (non-affiliated).

The Christian type is described as "faith education" (school guide 2014-2018, 4). In line with the value of encounter, we see that this education aims at exposing students to differing subjects and points of view, learning to develop a personal perspective.

In the general type of religious education, the multiform character of the former public school has to be recognizable. The school guide interprets this as follows: "by means of dialogue, we try to teach the students understanding of existing values and norms and the meaning of these in personal life and society" (school guide 2014-2018, 5). In this type of education, students have to attain respect for the convictions of others by exploring beliefs and communicating with each other; it is not based on a specific religious or philosophical ideology. Although dialogue is referenced in this text, it is the only time it is mentioned.

For the encounter between students, the school organizes religious education according to a specific pattern: the teachers choose themes derived from a lesson guide for Christian education. The teachers mention the theme daily in the moment of contemplation, which takes 10-15 minutes. Specific Christian or general religious education is offered twice a week, also connected to this central theme and provided by teachers who are qualified. This takes 1.5 hours a week at most. After this segregated moment, the students return to their regular classes and inform each other briefly about the content they discussed. In a weekly closing ceremony, all students give a presentation to students from other classes about what came up in the segregated moments. Religious celebrations are organized at Christmas and Easter. There are two Christmas celebrations: a secular event for all students in the village hall and a Christian celebration organized for and by students of Christian education in the church. Students of general religious education and their parents are welcome, but they do not participate actively.

In order to design a new and dialogical practice, the school composed a taskforce of four teachers. The principal of the school provided contact information for the teachers participating in the study, one of whom is the principal himself. Three teachers were present during all the design meetings. A fourth teacher dropped out after the first session for time management reasons. In the third and fourth, she was replaced by a colleague who also organizes general religious education. All meetings were attended by teachers from both Christian and non-affiliated backgrounds.

5. *Method, data and analysis*

The school wanted to improve the practice of celebration, focusing on encounter, and facilitated the teachers in scheduling time to improve this practice by themselves. To retrieve knowledge about the implementation of encounter in the shape of dialogue at a cooperation school, the process of developing an experimental form of celebration was designed as a participatory action research cycle, guided and monitored by one of the researchers: the first author. On the continuum of positionality in participatory action research, this researcher can be seen as an outsider, collaborating with insiders (Herr and Anderson 2005). The mode of participation of the insiders can be labeled as consultation; this means that insiders work together with the researchers to create a new practice,

but the outsider–researcher determines priorities and directs the process (Herr and Anderson 2005). The first author designed four group sessions and created an agenda for each session. There was consensus about the objective of the trajectory and the research question, but the steps were designed by the first author, and the teachers followed the directions of the researcher. Of course it was not clear beforehand what kind of celebration would be constructed, what shape and content it would have, or how dialogue was implemented in this experiment. The intention was to discover those things during the process. There were three sessions to develop the new celebration and one to evaluate it. All meetings consisted of two elements. First, the researcher encouraged individual reflection on values and celebration requirements. Second, he organized discussion between the teachers about their individual reflection and the consequences for the experimental celebration.

The first three meetings took place during a three-week period in November 2016. The objectives of the first meeting were: to detect school values as interpreted by the teachers, to share professional values; and to reflect on design requirements of a new practice interpreted as a celebration. The second meeting consisted of the reflection on the school values in relation to the common practice of religious education, and on the content of the new design. The third meeting was organized to construct this practice in relation to the values and requirements. In December 2017, the activity was put into practice. In January 2017, a fourth session meeting was organized to evaluate this activity.

In all four session meetings, the first author referred to dialogue as a possible way of expressing encounter as a key value of school identity. By asking questions, summarizing a part of the meeting, or stating a possible conclusion, he verified whether and how the participants interpret dialogue as a central feature of a practice of religious education at their school. Especially in the three meetings that prepare for the celebration, the first author asks the participants what motives they have for organizing didactics and the role of dialogue in this context. In doing so, he tries to verify the interpretation of dialogue that the participants express in implementing this value and what concepts of religious education direct their actions.

The first meeting resulted in a consensus in the group about the values of the school and about their concept of religious education. The teachers also formulated design requirements for a celebration in the context of dialogue and encounter. In the second meeting, the teachers discussed the coherency and tensions between their personal and professional values for education, the values from the formal school documents and the lived practice of religious education. In the third meeting, the subjective professional theory of the teachers regarding a good celebration was explored and ideas for form and content of the new celebration were discussed.

The last meeting was the evaluation meeting, in which the participants reflected on the degree of success in light of the objective of dialogical religious education. During the group sessions the first author played an explicit role: he contributed to the meetings by putting forward results of our previous research, theory about dialogue in religious education and quotes from formal documents of the school. His interventions aimed at facilitating the teachers in expressing themselves by sharing motives, concepts and ideas and at creating an awareness of the relevance of encounter and dialogue in constructing a celebration that would correspond to the school values.

The first three sessions can be seen as the planning phase of the research cycle, while the celebration is the acting phase, the monitoring of the celebration marks the end of the observation phase, and the fourth session (evaluation) can be seen as the reflection phase (cf. Koshy 2010). Regrettably, there was no time for a second research cycle to continue the process and improve the celebration based on the conclusions from the reflection phase.

We used various kinds of data in our research. For instance, school documents and website entries were subjected to a content analysis to create a picture of the school's vision on education and on religious education and to get acquainted with the core values of the school. The results were inserted in the discussions in the group sessions. All four group sessions were recorded in order to monitor the design and evaluation process. We also retrieved participant reports from each session. These reports were structured based on open questions regarding the teachers' learning process (e.g. 'What did you discover'; 'what do you have to learn?'). Written artefacts such as value cards and paper sheets from a flap-over created during the sessions were also analyzed.

The recordings, written artefacts and the participant reports were subjected to content analysis by various coding techniques in two coding cycles. The content analysis was structured based on topics related to our research question (concepts, motives, values, design requirements, evaluation). In the first cycle, In Vivo Coding and Values Coding were used. In the second cycle, categories were described following the process of Pattern Coding (Saldaña 2009).

In the first cycle, we indicated codes in our data. In the second cycle, we searched for categories in the codes. With regard to the topic of values, we found e.g. a category of values related to school identity, and a category of values related to religious education. With regard to reliability of the analysis, we used two kinds of control: first, the second author performed the coding process independently; where differences occurred, a discussion took place between the two authors to reach consensus. Minor adaptations in coding and in the formulation of the conclusions were made. Second, the results of the analysis were presented at the participating school. This did not lead to adaptations.

6. Results

In the following sections, we present the results of our analysis of the data that are generated in the four sessions with the group of teachers.

6.1. Core values of the school

Our coding process resulted in six categories. Teachers emphasize that these categories of values overlap at some points.

a. Child-oriented.

The school guide focuses on children's own responsibility and independence. The development of their "personal path" (school guide 2014-2018, 5) and their "personal values and norms" (school guide 2014-2018, 5) is an explicit objective of both Christian and general education. It is also worth noting that the school guide mentions that asking questions is important for childhood development in general and in Christian education, whereas the teachers do not indicate this to be a primary characteristic in educating students.

b. Safety.

This value is stated on paper by three teachers and formulated in the formal identity of the school. It is also referred to in the session dialogue, where teachers interpret safety as a common value in their personal views and in the formal views, as a condition for the encounter between children and as a “good pedagogical climate”. It is seen as an opportunity for children to express themselves in a personal way. In session 1, one of the teachers mentions that the school celebrations correspond to this value of safety.

c. Respect.

Two teachers formulated this as a core value. It is also specified in the school guide (2014-2018, 4) as “respect for the differences between children”, as “tolerance and mutual solidarity”, as “active attention for diversity in society”. It is also explicated as an objective for general religious education. However, it is not mentioned explicitly as a characteristic of Christian education. Like the value of safety, one of the teachers interprets respect as a value that links personal and formal school views. A teacher of general religious education formulates one of her objectives referring to respect as follows: “I teach students to have respect for differences between religions and for the differences between children in the group.” (session 2). Respect is linked to diversity in class and in society by the teachers as well as the school guide. The value of openness that one teacher formulated on a card can be placed in this category. The school guide (2014-2018, 4) affirms openness as a value: “every child is welcome”, and diversity is encouraged.

d. Encounter.

Encounter is as a key value because it is mentioned frequently in the school guide and in session 1 and session 2. The first line of the mission statement in the guide labels the school as an “encounter school” (2014-2018, 4). This is interpreted as the cooperation between “teachers, students and parents from various religious backgrounds” (2014-2018, 4). Teachers indicated in session 2 that this encounter is limited to encounter between “atheistic” and “very ecclesiastically engaged students”.

The school guide describes encounter as an objective of Christian education: “to bring the children in contact with God, the Bible and the other” (2014-2018, 4). Teachers recognize moments of encounter in religious education. They

refer to the exchange of thoughts in the collective group after the segregated moments. In the first session meeting, three participants mention that this brief discussion hardly takes place in practice. During a presentation of our findings to the team, teachers indicate that this practice has been resumed. The teachers also note that the closing ceremony and the celebrations only involve a limited degree of encounter: students present to other students on stage. In session 1, a teacher mentioned that other celebrations than Christmas express relevant values more for students of Christian education. In mentioning this limitation, teachers interpret encounter as the practice of dialogue and interaction between students.

e. Togetherness.

This value, as such or in the form of ‘cooperation’, was mentioned on cards five times. The aim is to work and live together in a sense of togetherness, in order to prepare the students to be active citizens in society. In session 1, one of the teachers stressed his appreciation of the fact that a wide range of children and parents, from atheistic through highly ecclesiastic and ‘everything in between’, visit the school. Another teacher addressed the view that the school celebrations correspond to the value of working together. The teachers especially appreciated that the value of cooperation between students of general and Christian religious education are joined together in mixed groups during regular lessons besides separated religious education and in some celebrations. However, it was also mentioned in session 1 that there seems to be a discrepancy between this value and the Christian celebration of Christmas, where students of general education only watch. It is a conscious policy of the school to organize this celebration for and by students of Christian religious education only. In the description of Christian education, faith is regarded as “a way of living together” (2014-2018, 4).

f. Commitment.

The school guide mentions the value of commitment to societal themes in the common description of religious education as well as both general and Christian types. This is a dominant interpretation of the value of commitment. In session 2, teachers of both Christian and general religious education stressed that they “teach children to look at the world” (teacher of Christian education – session 2) and “paid attention to societal subjects like the environment” (teacher of general religious education – session 2). However, this notion was a marginal consideration

during the meetings. In session 2, a teacher acknowledged this discrepancy, stating that their personal values formulated on cards in session 1 do not explicitly mention societal values. Adding to these core values, our analysis also shows that equality, which was a core value in our previous studies, is not mentioned on the cards or in the school guide. However, it was mentioned in session 1 as a 'basis for respect'. It seems to be regarded as an implicit value that supports all others. In addition, we also see a focus on the Christian tradition and the Bible in the examples of Christian education practice and in the school guide concerning Christian religious education, although the teachers do not mention addressing Christian faith as a school value.

6.2. *Design requirements of a new practice*

School documents call collective educational practices 'celebrations': at the end of every week, students from both general and Christian education present to each other what they have learned that week. To stay close to this school tradition of using the term 'celebration' for collective activities for encounter in religious education, we used this term in our research. In the sessions leading to new activity, the teachers also interpreted their new design as a celebration, probably because of this tradition.

We found three categories of requirements for a collective celebration: child-centered focus, content and encounter. We interpret these as main characteristics of the practice of religious education that reflect the key values of the school.

a. Child-centered focus

Teachers emphasize the orientation on students' thoughts and experiences when they design the shape and content of a celebration. Child-centeredness is a category that connects the values of the teachers, their design requirements and their celebration perceptions. The teachers consider it important that the celebration encourages students to explore their experiences, thoughts and feelings. The teachers focus on the students' experiences and thoughts to such an extent that they do not consider the transfer of knowledge to be an objective of the celebration.

b. Content

The celebration needs to address a central theme that is discussed during the lessons of general and Christian education prior to the celebration. The teachers chose the theme 'What makes you quiet?', suggested by the lesson guide and addressed in the Christmas celebration. It was interpreted here as 'What impresses you?'. In

this celebration, 'values and norms need to be addressed' in which the students recognize themselves. Students reflect on this content; this is a common theme in the teachers' celebration perceptions. It seems that the values of school identity and religious education are more connected to the objective of being together and the focus on life experiences than to the attention for content as in the lessons of Christian and general education. Teachers do find that a celebration needs to be relevant to the students.

c. Togetherness

Teachers speak highly of respect, dialogue, and being and living together as key aspects to be expressed in the celebration. They emphasize that students are encouraged to explore differences and similarities between their personal views in the celebration. Focusing on this, the teachers move away from the common situation in which the students present songs, poems and plays to each other during celebrations and weekly closing ceremonies. In the newly designed celebration of exploring similarities and differences, the teachers acknowledge the regular lessons of general and Christian education.

6.3. *The content of the design*

6.3.1. *The designed celebration*

Students from 8-12 years old are gathered in the gym. They sit in small groups. Every group consists of students of every age, from both general and Christian education. Four teachers are present. One of the teachers welcomes everyone and explains what the students can expect.

First, photos of highlights of national and international news are shown on screen. The principal invites the students to watch the photos and to reflect individually on three questions: What do you see? What do you feel or think when you see these photos? Do you know other examples of this experience? After all the photos are shown, students are invited to discuss these questions in small groups.

After 5 minutes, the teacher asks a few students to answer the question in the plenary assembly. Then the same teacher reads a poem about friendship between two children.

Three questions are shown on screen: What do you hear when listening to this poem? What do you feel or think when you listening? Do you know other examples of the experience that is presented in this poem? When the reading of the poem is finished, the students discuss their answers

to the three questions in the same small groups. After 5 minutes, the teacher asks a few students to answer the question in the plenary assembly. The next element is the reading of a small story about arguing and making up afterwards. It is read by another teacher. The same three questions are shown on screen and discussed after the reading is finished. After 5 minutes, the teacher who read the story asks a few students to answer the question in the plenary assembly. Then another teacher introduces a film trailer about a child that explores possibilities to influence the chances for his father to survive a war abroad. The students watch this trailer for 2 minutes and then talk about their answers to the same three questions that are projected on screen. After 5 minutes, the same teacher asks a few students to answer the question in the plenary assembly. The final element of the celebration is a drawing by every student. The teacher who introduced the trailer also explains that the students are going to draw – individually, in pairs or as a group – their perceptions, their thoughts that reflect one of the fragments that has been shown or read in the celebration. The teacher tells them that they can also write a short story or poem. Then all students work for about 15 minutes. It turns out that almost all students do an individual drawing. After these 15 minutes, some students tell something about their work in the plenary assembly. The teacher who welcomed the students also thanks the students for their contributions and invites them to go to their classroom again. The whole activity lasts about 70 minutes.

6.3.2. *Analysis of the content of the design*

In analyzing the content of the design wherein all students meet, we detect three categories, which are similar in some ways to the categories of section 6.2. We interpret these categories as characteristics of the design through which teachers shape a practice based on key values of the school.

a. Students' experiences

Teachers refer to the possibility for students to reflect on and to express their feelings and thoughts as an objective of the celebration. There must be a connection to daily life and current events. The value of child-centered education is expressed strongly in this objective. During a presentation of our findings to the team, teachers indicated that this development of a personal identity for students is also important for living together with other people and in society. It is interesting to see that the teachers present components of the design without

addressing a specific experience that can be recognizable for students: the material is open to free interpretation. This enables the students to express various experiences and thoughts.

In this way, we see that the focus on students' experiences and perceptions are in line with the teachers' values and the school values, and that this is a dominant objective of the design. This focus is recognizable during the activity in the questions that are asked and the material that is presented. This was very explicit during the dialogue between a teacher and one student in the entire group, after the dialogue in small groups. There is no focus on one specific student's experience in the dialogue in small groups, nor in the closing assignment.

b. Content

The teachers recognize a relationship between the theme ('What makes you quiet?') and the choice of material: this poem, story and trailer can make an impression. Nevertheless, this theme is not highlighted during the dialogue groups, nor in the closing assignment. Although teachers choose to follow this central theme in the preparation, students discuss a variety of subjects in carrying out the activity.

c. Dialogue

In the sessions, teachers value dialogue as a unique characteristic of this specific design. The key value of encounter is expressed in another way than through the presentations in the way that they are used to in their practice of celebrations. According to the teachers, students are more actively involved when dialogue is fostered. Dialogue is clearly structured: small groups are formed by the teachers, questions for this dialogue are pre-selected, and time is allotted. Remarkably, the teachers did not deliberately form the small dialogue groups to bring together students from Christian education and general religious education; that convergence happened coincidentally. Some students (aged 11 and 12 years), in whom the teacher has confidence, have been appointed as moderators, although they are not used to fulfilling this role. The dialogue between students is about the presented material: the poem, the story and the trailer. Most students complete the closing assignment individually. All teachers indicate that they recognize their values and those of the school in this new practice. They also see several connections between the design and the design requirements collected in the sessions.

6.4. *Evaluation of the practice by the teachers*

In our fourth session, we evaluated the celebration and asked the teachers to relate it to the school values and their design requirements. We divide our results of the analysis of the evaluation meeting into four categories.

a. The practice is valued as an expression of the teachers' personal views

The participants evaluate the practice very positively. They appreciate this activity as a way of expressing values that they endorse, specifically mentioning dialogue and the opportunity for students to present their personal feelings and thoughts. All participants recognize their personal perceptions of celebrating in a cooperation school. The participants suggest one important improvement for organizing a practice that they interpret as a celebration that is even more in line with their values: they would consider addressing issues of faith and differences between Christian and general religious education. According to the participants, this will promote further intensification of dialogue.

b. The practice is valued as an expression of school values

All participants recognize a strong connection between the practice and the school values. The activity fosters dialogue, which is seen as a key characteristic that reflects a school value. It is remarkable that three of the participants do not mention which school values are reflected. One participant notes that child-centered and society-centered are values that the celebration reflects, without specifying which elements of the celebration do so.

c. The practice is valued as an activity for encounter

We see that the participants recognize a connection between the activity and the theoretical concept of learning in diversity. They interpret this practice as an expression of this view, in which students learn from each other and bridges between different perspectives are built. The participants also see a discrepancy between theory and the practice when confronted with the concept of learning in encounter. In the session, the participants indicated that possible religious content could have enhanced dialogue about differences. However, they preferred a general theme rather than a religious or Christian theme, making it more possible for all students to recognize themselves. They also mentioned that their role during the activity was to stimulate dialogue in the small student groups.

d. The practice is valued as an activity in the school curriculum

All the participants are very clear in their evaluation that this new activity is complementary to the recent curriculum. However, it is not considered a replacement of current celebrations. There are two reasons for pointing out the difference between the new and existing celebrations. First, the new celebration addresses a general philosophical theme. The fact that specific Christian content is addressed in the curriculum is appreciated, thus preventing the participants from using the new celebration to replace the Christmas celebration for students of Christian religious education. Second, this new celebration encourages dialogue, while the common celebrations and the weekly closing ceremony focus on presentations. This innovation offers the teachers ample reason to maintain this new practice.

6.5. Evaluation of the design process by the teachers

After every meeting, the teachers filled in a participant report. This enabled us to monitor how the participants evaluated the process and whether something needed to be adjusted in order to achieve the objectives. In the participant reports from session 1, three participants mention they value their new insight that dialogue can be an important new element in a new activity of religious education; it was apparently explicitly mentioned in the first meeting. Regarding the second meeting, one of the participants mentions being inspired by brainstorming about ways to stimulate dialogue. In the reports of meetings 3 and 4, dialogue is valued in another way. In session 3, two participants mention that they value the way they constructed the celebration collectively. This collectiveness is appreciated. In session 4, three participants value the possibility in this meeting for evaluating the celebration together and looking for collectiveness, and they appreciate the discussions among themselves. In session 4, the participants also indicate that dialogue about the school values would not have been maintained without the contribution of the first author.

7. *Conclusions*

We asked the following question: What are the teachers' motives for pursuing an experimental celebration at a cooperation school, what concepts and design requirements are involved, and how can this celebration be evaluated from a theory of dialogue and from the teachers' perspective? Based on the research discussed above, we can draw the following three conclusions.

Our first conclusion concerns the identity of this specific cooperation school as an 'encounter school'. Theory about encounter in (religious) education emphasizes this characteristic as important to teachers in handling plurality (Wardekker and Miedema 2001a; Jackson 2004; Keaten and Soukup 2009; Leganger-Krogstad 2003). The participants stress it in the meetings as an important feature of their cooperation school. They also indicate that encounter is limited in their regular practice of religious education. In the meetings, the participants interpret encounter as the practice of dialogue and interaction between students. It is the implementation of this dialogue that was the main motivation for the teachers to participate in the research. They felt the need to deal with the limitation of dialogue in their religious education. Following this interpretation, the teachers recognize and value dialogue as a key element of the new practice and a valuable addition to the regular curriculum. Therefore, the teachers underline this new practice as an expression of the value of encounter and consequently of a key concept of their school identity. We can conclude that it is possible to create new practices of religious education in which teachers recognize school values.

Second, we recognize conditions for dialogue in this new design, as interpreted by the participants. As design requirements of this experimental celebration, the participants indicate their desire to provide religious education that fosters a climate in which students are respected and feel safe, and where attention is paid to students' personal thoughts and feelings, without making distinctions based on background or religious views. This attention is a quality that connects formal and personal values, the requirements of a celebration stated by the teachers, and the final activity. The participants interpret this climate of respect and safety and the focus on student perceptions as important conditions for the implementation of dialogue in education. This interpretation is shared by all teachers, in both general and Christian religious education. In the design of their celebration, they felt the need

to implement this requirement in order to put the concept of dialogue into practice. A third conclusion concerns the content of the new celebration in relation to the concept of dialogue. The teachers are pleased that the new practice addresses a general theme with which all students can identify. This implies two concepts of collective religious education that fosters dialogue.

In the first place, the exchange of students' personal experiences and views and the substantive attention for these experiences and views can enhance dialogue, according to the teachers. The identification with the theme and, therefore, the possibility for students to participate in the dialogue about their experiences with and their views on this theme, are seen as a strong concept of dialogical religious education. It is a characteristic of dialogue that fosters the development of the student's personal identity (Roebben 2000; Elias 2010; Orteza Y Miranda 2010). In the designed practice, it is stimulated by a free dialogue about stories, poems or images. However, in the dialogue between students, there is no attention to any specific existential theme that are explored by the students. Similarly, the general theme of 'What makes you quiet?' is not discussed in dialogue. A variety of themes is explored and there is no central focus on any theme or experience.

Our second concept is in line with the first. It seems that 'a general theme' is interpreted as a theme without any connection to or emphasis on a religious content or religious denomination or background. On the contrary, this new design lacks a reference to any religious tradition or any possible religious view of the students or teachers. The new design makes no distinction between religious views from general or Christian religious education. In other words, we see that a practice of dialogue can be organized in line with school values, but this dialogue is limited: there is no focus on any central existential theme that is explored by a variety of perspectives, and the dialogue is not moderated professionally. It seems these factors prevent the dialogue from contributing to the development of the students' identity.

8. Discussion

8.1. Questions for religious education

Our questions concern practices of religious education that express dialogue between students from different backgrounds. These questions arise from the

evaluation of the experimental celebration from a theoretical perspective, as well from the participants' point of view.

Our first question regards the content of the new practice. Our data show that the activity focuses strongly on listening "to others with both patience and tolerance" (Elias 2010, 70). Students discuss their personal answers to given questions. They express respect and equality, which the teachers state are core values of the school. However, a variety of themes are discussed. In the evaluative session, the participants also indicated that choosing religious content for this practice could have enhanced dialogue about differences. However, they preferred a general rather than a religious or Christian theme in order to encourage all students to recognize themselves. It seems like this variety of themes and the absence of some content restricted the dialogue and the development of student's personal identity as an aim of dialogue in religious education (Roebben 2000; Elias 2010; Orteza Y Miranda 2010). In this line, we assume that specific reference to religious perspectives (and in the case of this school, those perspectives were mostly Christian) fosters dialogue. Consequently, we ask: what contribution can the content of dialogue, and especially content of religious traditions, in collective religious education make when it comes to fostering the student's religious identity?

Secondly, the participants assigned the oldest students to act as moderators in the small groups. The teachers walked around during the celebration and encouraged dialogue. These oldest students are neither accustomed to performing this task, nor have they been enabled to fulfill it. As a result, it was hardly possible to verify whether the content was put into dialogue or whether any issues that deal with identity development were discussed in the small groups. This leads us to the following question: what competences suit a moderator of dialogue in the context of plurality?

Our third question deals with the concept of a celebration. Teachers of the studied cooperation school interpret collective moments of religious education as 'celebrations'. To connect to this perception, we also referred to the design of the new practice as a celebration. Especially the fact that students gather and contemplate existential themes is a similarity between the designed practice and a celebration. However, a celebration also has more elements, such as singing, making music and listening to music, and contemplative rituals like prayer. Although we

classed the new design as a celebration, it only has some of the characteristics of a celebration. It could also be called a religious education lesson for a large group of students. Therefore, we ask what the elements are of a celebration that fits the general description and that implements dialogue as an expression of the school value of encounter.

8.2. *Questions for further research*

A study of one school provided us with answers to our main question. This particular cooperation school offers lessons in religious education divided along the lines of the original denominations: public and Christian. It also organizes religious education where students from the two types of religious education meet. This school has hardly any experience with collective religious education in which religious content is introduced into dialogue among all the students. The newly developed practice is the start of a new experience for these teachers. However, other cooperation schools have other practices of religious education (Renkema, Mulder and Barnard 2016). Therefore, we suggest conducting action research with teachers of cooperation schools that offer collective religious lessons: could this lead to a practice that answers the questions we discussed in 8.1? Our second question relates to the perspective on objectives and values of education in general. Can we provide a specific perspective that sheds light on possible ways to deal with these discrepancies and with the implementation of this view in religious education? This perspective may help teachers and principals of cooperation schools to reflect on the educational values in their unique setting and on the coherent correlation between these values and the practice of religious education.

8.3. *Beyond a single case study*

Our research is based on a single case study that we defined as a pilot study. The answers to our research question cannot be transposed onto all cooperation schools. This is an important restriction of our analysis and our conclusions. However, this pilot study does add to our previous research by putting forward a new perspective on the discrepancy we detected. It was the discrepancy between the school values of encounter and the limited practices of religious education. In our previous research, we saw in particular that dialogue, as an expression of encounter, was hardly fostered in daily practice. In this participatory action research, teachers tried to handle this discrepancy by designing a new and experimental celebration in which dialogue was organized. However, in this process of designing, and

particularly in the content of this celebration, we detected another aspect of limitations in practice: the content of the celebration was not fully discussed by the students. This single case study is worthwhile, therefore, because we see a new perspective on limitations of the expression of school values in practice. Without this specific research, we would not have been able to fully understand the processes that create these limitations. Now that we detected this new perspective, we have more data to conduct further research in order to develop the correspondence between values and practices of cooperation schools.

8.4. *The role of the researcher*

In the process of designing the experimental celebration, the researcher played an important role. This role was twofold.

First, in all meetings of the participants, the researcher related the motives and perceptions of the teachers to the school values: both formal as well as prescribed by the teachers. Everything that was discussed needed to be related to these values. Second, the researcher emphasized the concept of dialogue. This concept was the main reason for teachers to participate in this research: it was their desire to implement dialogue in an experimental celebration. In all meetings, the researcher presented the concept of dialogue as an important characteristic and requirement of the celebration, in line with the school values and the teachers' motives for participating.

It turned out to be important that the researcher underlined these two aspects. Apparently, in the process of designing new practices for religious education, teachers find it challenging to keep in mind the relation between these practices and the school values, both as formally set out in school documents and as prescribed by the teachers themselves. Deliberate implementation of school values remains a challenge.



CHAPTER 6

DUTCH COOPERATION SCHOOLS AS
DEMOCRATIC COMMUNITIES.
A CONSTRUCTIVE PERSPECTIVE FROM
DEWEY'S VIEW ON DEMOCRACY IN
EDUCATION

Abstract

In this article, the authors reflect on the results of their previous research at cooperation schools in the Netherlands, where students and teachers from non-affiliated and Christian backgrounds come together. Dewey's perspective on educating democratic values is combined with empirical results of this research, answering the question what Dewey's concept contributes to the reflection on the relation between values and religious education at these schools. This article shows that this reflection and the implementation of value-based religious education offers opportunities for schools that face the challenge of practicing encounter between students from different backgrounds.

I believe that the school is primarily a social institution. Education being a social process, the school is simply that form of community life in which all those agencies are concentrated that will be most effective in bringing the child to share in the inherited resources of the race, and to use his own powers for social ends. (Dewey 1897, 2/3)

1. *Introduction*

Cooperation schools in the Netherlands are a unique type, resulting from a merger between a public school and a non-government school. Especially in those areas of the Netherlands where the number of children is decreasing, schools are likely to merge or consider merging (Renkema, Mulder and Barnard 2016, 2017). In the last decade, there has been an increase in the number of cooperation schools. The core concept of this system is the existence of both public and non-government schools that are equally financed by the government. A public school is religiously neutral and approaches religious differences actively. A non-government school is almost always a school that is driven by confessional values (Renkema, Mulder and Barnard 2016; 2017).

Current discussions about this trend in politics, in school boards and in teams of teachers indicate that cooperation schools are dealt with in ways that are both delicate and ambitious. We will elaborate on two challenges of schools in modern society and the unique position of cooperation schools concerning these challenges. In describing the position of cooperation schools, we will refer to the empirical findings of our previous research.

First, many schools deal with the challenge of creating a commonality between school values as interpreted by teachers, students, parents and formal documents, on the one side, and the practice of education, on the other side. Therefore, a focused attention on these values and the relation between these values and educational practice is necessary. In both public and non-government schools teachers “are hardly aware of the formal identity of the school” (Bakker and Ter Avest 2014, 411) or “of the relation of their pedagogical strategies to the school’s identity” (Bakker and Ter Avest 2014, 411). Especially in classrooms where diversity is apparent, there is a “discrepancy between the official identity of the school as it is formulated in official documents, and every day practice” (Ter Avest et al. 2007, 250).

Several authors plead for the coordination of values of pedagogy, didactics and philosophy of life that are present in schools (Ter Avest et al. 2007). For this coordination to take place, it is important that the teachers are given the opportunity to express their own interpretations of school values and how these interpretations influence the daily practice of education (Bakker and Ter Avest 2005).

The second challenge for schools in western societies is dealing with diversity in society and in the classroom (Ipgrave 2004). Religious and intercultural education play an especially important role in this plural setting (Schreiner 2006a). Milot states that this education aims for the student's "openness to diversity" and for "uniting citizens beyond their moral and religious differences and disagreements" (2006, 15).

When a public, neutral school and a non-government, confessional school merge to become a new entity, the principals, teachers, parents and students of this cooperation school are challenged to reflect on the common values of the new school's identity. The motives for and organization of religious education must also be considered.

In previous research, we investigated the relationship between the common values of school identity and religious education in cooperation schools. In our empirical research, we first mapped the field by means of an online questionnaire. After an analysis of the questionnaire, we conducted five case studies. The studies revealed underlying views, values and beliefs, their coherence (or lack thereof), and their relationship with the existing practice of religious education. We used both a single case study (Renkema, Mulder and Barnard 2017) as well as a multiple-case study (Renkema, Mulder and Barnard 2018a). In the final empirical phase, we designed a participatory action research study to detect what motivations and challenges teachers face when they are asked to create an experimental celebration (Renkema, Mulder and Barnard 2018b).

In the empirical results of our previous research, we recognize the first challenge we described above: the reflection on the relation between school identity and the practice of religious education. We see that this reflection hardly leads to a congruent whole between cooperation school values and religious education. All

respondents – teachers and principals alike – regard their school as a place where living together and encounter are practiced (Renkema, Mulder and Barnard 2016, 2017, 2018a). However, this perspective, and especially the value of encounter, are rarely expressed in moments of contemplation and celebrations (Renkema, Mulder and Barnard 2017, 2018a). Moments of contemplation are daily moments in which religious themes are presented. In our research we focused on dialogue as a way of expressing the value of encounter. We concluded that dialogue is limited because of the segregated nature of contemplation at many cooperation schools, along the lines of the distinction between public education and confessional denominations. We see a similar segregation in schools' collective celebrations: students from secular formation education present to all other students, as do students from Christian formation education (Renkema, Mulder and Barnard 2018b). Dialogue is not practiced in the didactics of the moments of contemplation nor in the celebrations (Renkema, Mulder and Barnard 2017, 2018a, 2018b).

We investigated the relation between school identity and the practice of religious education in the context of the plurality that is characteristic for this type of school: students and teachers of secular education come together with students and teachers of confessional education. Confessional education is, in most cases that we have investigated, Christian (Renkema, Mulder and Barnard 2016). The specific kind of diversity in school and classroom could be a strong impulse for the professionals of cooperation schools to reflect on the question of how to match school values and their interpretations with the practice of religious education. Cooperation schools in particular must deal with the challenge to reflect on this match: they have merged, mainly because of external circumstances, and the merging two identities become a new school identity.

Respondents in our research see opportunities for expressing their educational values and those of formal school documents in religious education, which consists of moments of contemplation and celebrations (Renkema, Mulder and Barnard 2017, 2018a). Indeed, religious education theory suggests that educational practices about religious themes can foster a sense of community. Miedema states, for example, that students need to experience, be confronted by, and “should become acquainted with other children's backgrounds, ideas, experiences, and practices including the ones related to religions and worldview in the embryonic or mini society of the school” (2014, 365).

In our research we frequently have asked the question why this potential of religious education to enhance mutual understanding and encounter between students from different backgrounds is hardly ever expressed in the practice of cooperation schools (Renkema, Mulder and Barnard 2017, 2018a, 2018b).

2. Educating democratic values

In this final article of our research, we incorporate Dewey's concept of democracy to further inform the debate about the lack of consistency between school values and educational practice, and to provide concrete suggestions for improving a practice of religious education that is in line with the values of cooperation schools. We do so knowing that democracy in education is a major subject in publications that deal with the role of schools in educating values in a plural society (see, for example, Apple and Beane 2007; Jackson 2004).

By adding John Dewey's perspective on democracy in education, we equip the discussion about the expression of educational values in religious education with a theoretical view on values that are the basis of cooperation schools and concrete suggestions for enhancing the values-based and dialogical practice of religious education. We explore whether Dewey's perspective can be helpful in developing practices of encounter and dialogue.

Although Dewey passed away more than half a century ago, his views on education in democratic societies are still referenced in academic discourse.

In our study of theory about Dewey we see a strong emphasis on issues that are still highly relevant to education that aims at encounter and living together in mutual understanding.

First, in several publications Dewey is shown to be relevant because his views aim at pluralistic democracies (Ghiloni 2011; Sutinen, Kallioniemi and Pihlström 2015). A central point of Dewey's views is that living in a pluralistic world where encounters of differences between people take place regularly can be a challenge for society. Several authors still refer to Dewey when the challenge of democratic and interreligious education is discussed (Webster 2009; Ghiloni 2011; Sutinen, Kallioniemi and Pihlström 2015). It is the construction of a "society toward democratic ends" (Ghiloni 2011, 488) that is the ultimate aim of Dewey's

educational philosophy and that is considered to be relevant to contemporary views on religious education (Webster 2009). We recognize a substantive parallel between his perspective and the values that our respondents underline for educating their students. Their value of students co-existing in the encounter of differences bears a strong resemblance to Dewey's perception of a school as a "miniature community" (1899, 15).

Second, in our previous research we recommended that teachers organize concrete practices of dialogue that facilitate expression of encounter between students from confessional and non-affiliated educations (Renkema, Mulder and Barnard 2017). Much Dewey scholarship continues to emphasize his plea for this sort of concrete acting as still relevant for democratic and interreligious education (Sutinen, Kallioniemi and Pihlström 2015; Ghiloni 2011; Berding and Miedema 2007). Theoretical views (Ghiloni 2011; Sutinen, Kallioniemi and Pihlström 2015; Webster 2009) also raise a third point that shows Dewey's views to be relevant for contemporary education in pluralistic contexts. Ghiloni shows that Dewey's perspective can prevent religious education from becoming theoretical, occupied with metaphysical exploration, "without any critical grasp of its meaning and function" (2011, 484) by embracing Dewey's view that "the natural center of interreligious education is not religious belief but life experience" (2011, 484). Dewey's emphasis on life experience in religious education shows a strong connection to an important result in our research: our respondents' valuation of the dialogue about students' life experiences in religious education that aims at encounter and mutual understanding. Living together in democratic societies is fostered when religion is "brought down to earth, to what is 'common' between human beings" (Sutinen, Kallioniemi and Pihlström 2015, 335). Religious educators that work with religious and non-religious students can still benefit from Dewey's focus on common life experiences that "must be able to transcend this divide" (Webster 2009, 97).

With these three points of resemblance between Dewey's views and contemporary literature we see a firm debate about education toward democratic ends. As demonstrated above, modern theory endorsing the education of students in democratic values is inspired by Dewey's perspective. In this modern theory the democratic aim is a distinctive characteristic of education. We recognize this aim in the aforementioned publications of Webster (2009), Sutinen, Kallioniemi and

Pihlström (2015) and Ghiloni (2011), but also in a recent publication of Miedema in which he builds on former insights of Habermas and McLaughlin. These insights connect education in democratic values with citizenship education for all students and with the concrete implementation of “mutual learning processes and dialogue between

religious and secular citizens” (Miedema 2014, 366). Democratic values for living together and learning from differences are to be taught in citizenship education and in religious education in the context of societal developments and incidents that keep showing the need for this education (Miedema 2014). Apparently Dewey’s view on the role of education for fostering democratic values of students is still a main topic in academic discourse about both religious education as well as citizenship education in modern society.

We also recognize a relationship between Dewey’s perspective on democratic education and empirical data from our research. First, we recognize a substantive parallel between his perspective and the values that our respondents underline for educating their students. Their value of students co-existing in the encounter of differences bears a strong resemblance to Dewey’s perception of a school as a “miniature community” (1899, 15). Moreover, the respondents’ valuation of the dialogue about students’ life experiences seems to be in line with the central role of experience that Dewey highlights in his vision on education. Our respondents value the attention for life experiences in religious education as a way of fostering dialogue: when students explore differences and commonalities between their experiences in life this enhances the expression of encounter as a core school value. Second, Dewey’s view on democracy can be constructive for the reflection on the concrete practice of religious education of cooperation schools. We detected a discrepancy between key values as mentioned by formal documents and the respondents on the one hand, and religious education practice on the other. We recommended that teachers organize concrete practices of dialogue that facilitate expression of encounter between students from confessional and non-affiliated education (Renkema, Mulder and Barnard 2017). Because of Dewey’s dominant focus on education in the context of plurality and on the school as a community (Biesta and Miedema 1999), we elaborate on his perspective on democracy and relate it to the specific plurality as a characteristic of cooperation schools and their educational practices where encounter and community are expressed.

What, then, is the contribution of Dewey's concept of democracy to reflection on values and religious education at cooperation schools?

3. *Dewey and Democracy in Education*

The concept of democracy in education in Dewey's view has two aspects: sociological and psychological (1897).

First, education has a sociological aim. Dewey stresses the "social responsibilities of education" (1980, 200). Education can only be characterized in terms of its ultimate objective: its contribution to societal and communal values and therefore the presentation of "situations where problems are relevant to the problems of living together" (1980, 200).

In his interpretation of society as "an organic union of individuals" (1897, 2), he emphasizes commonality in spirit and aims of its members (1899). In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey states that an "undesirable society (...) is one which internally and externally sets up barriers to free intercourse and communication of experience" (1980, 105). From his perspective, "a spirit of free communication" (1899, 13) must be practiced in society.

In Dewey's view, there is a strong correlation between society and school education. A school has a "chance to be a miniature community, an embryonic society" (1899, 15). School is "a community life" (1897, 3). School is therefore correlated to the larger society encompassing all people and oriented towards promoting the collective prosperity of this society. Through education, students are involved in the development of a "spirit of social cooperation and community life" (1899, 14) and are regarded as "a social individual" (1897, 2). A child is always to be considered "a member of a unity" (1897, 1). The child learns what it means to be such a member in community from "the responses which others make to his own activities" (1897, 1).

These characteristics of an ideal society and education are democratic. Democracy is "a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience" (1980, 93). In their description of Dewey's views, Sutinen, Kallioniemi and Pihlström relate education to democratic competencies of "empathy, acceptance and respect" (2015, 346). By learning from each other and encountering different

perspectives in the social context of a safe classroom, students practice democratic values (Sutinen, Kallioniemi and Pihlström 2015; Webster 2009; Knight 1998).

The second aspect of Dewey's democratic education is psychological. Dewey emphasizes the psychological side as the basis of education (1897), pointing out that communal and societal aims cannot be reached without paying attention to the student's evolution of experience. In multiple publications, Dewey underlines the importance of concentrating on children's life experience (1899, 1902, 1938a, 1897): "That we learn from experience, and from books or the sayings of others *only* as they are related to experience, are not mere phrases" (1899, 14-15). Education must concentrate on this learning from and thinking about experiences. In democratic practices of education, "one shares in what another has thought and felt" (1980, 8). At the heart of this process is the response of children's minds and the creation of a new experience towards a "culmination of themselves" (1902, 123). We recognize this concept when Dewey, in his *Common Faith*, elaborates on experiences in (religious) education as religious experiences, or the "actual religious quality in the experience" (1934, 14), stressing a focus on general and natural experiences of all students. These experiences can be interpreted as religious when they are conceived as "the sense of awe and wonder, dependence, peace and joy that come with a mystical appreciation of oneself and one's community as integrated within the whole that constitutes the universe" (Knight 1998, 71). They should be the content of religious education instead of religions, institutionalized systems of faiths (Knight 1998).

In this focus on experiences, the educator has the task to create new experiences for the students by introducing stimuli (Dewey 1902; Knight 1998). It is not his task to transfer knowledge and ideas to the students or to shape their habits. The educator is a member of the school community who is responsible for choosing this stimuli in the educational process and guiding the student in response to these stimuli (Dewey 1897; Sutinen, Kallioniemi and Pihlström 2015). Sutinen, Kallioniemi and Pihlström describe this process as "an interpretative transformational process" (2015, 341). The student thus also communicates with these educational stimuli that represent previous experiences, "the intellectual and moral resources which humanity has succeeded in getting together" (Dewey 1897, 1). These experiences from outside the students, which the teachers present in words and symbols (Dewey 1980; Sutinen, Kallioniemi and Pihlström 2015), serve "as a guide to future experience" (Dewey 1902, 20).

Both aspects of democratic education come together in one of Dewey's central pleas for a "conjoint activity" (1980, 26), which fulfills both the sociological aim of fostering community life in school and the psychological aim of focusing on students' life experiences and on the experiences from outside the students. By participating in such an activity, the student "appropriates the purpose which actuates it, becomes familiar with its methods and subject matters, acquires needed skill, and is saturated with its emotional spirit" (1980, 26). We recognize both aspects and the creation of the activity mentioned as a "democratic environment" in Webster's portrait of Dewey's view:

For him education involves children learning how to inquire thoroughly and intelligently and this is only possible in a democratic environment. Democratic education, according to Dewey, sees children and teachers working together to make better sense of themselves and their world by listening to, challenging, testing and critiquing each other's ideas (2009, 93).

4. Cooperation Schools and Dewey's Perspective on Democracy

To answer our question of what Dewey's concept of democracy can contribute to reflections on the connection between values and religious education in cooperation schools, we formulate four points. In this, we follow Dewey's sociological and psychological aspects of democratic education. These remarks guide cooperation schools in reflecting on the balance between their core values of educating and the practices of religious education.

Our first observation concerns the relation between Dewey's sociological aspect of democracy in education and the practice of religious education of cooperation schools. Noting this, we also refer to Sutinen, Kallioniemi, and Pihlström in their elaboration on Dewey's philosophy of education:

If students only live in their own religious subgroups, no common religious language is possible. The existence of such diverse religious sub-groups blocks access to democratic ways of living, primarily because of the difficulty of creating a common religious language. A "common faith" is hard to establish among isolated groups. This impasse is also a barrier to the creative solution of religious problems. However, being exposed to religious thinking different from one's own helps provide the language and symbols needed to understand and develop multicultural and multifaith societies. (2015, 345/346).

Can we describe these segregated practices as examples of an “undesirable society: (...) one which internally and externally sets up barriers to free intercourse and communication of experience” (Dewey 1980, 105)? Can this question challenge cooperation schools to discuss their practice of segregated religious education in the light of Dewey’s sociological aspect of democracy in education?

Second, in Dewey’s view, communication is conditional for democracy, which “will have its consummation when free social inquiry is indissolubly wedded to the art of full and moving communication” (1927, 184). In our data, we see respondents’ valuation of communicating between students in religious education. On the other hand, we detected that the implementation of didactics for this communication between students was limited (Renkema, Mulder and Barnard 2017). This inconsistency between Dewey’s emphasis on communication and the limited practices of this important aspect of democratic education leads us to believe that religious education in cooperation schools can more effectively express key values of living together and commonality by enhancing practices of community. In these practices, Dewey’s sociological aspect of democracy and the school values are expressed in practices in which “the making of something in common” (1938b, 46) is manifested. This means working on activities in religious education that foster dialogue between students from different backgrounds. In doing so, a cooperation school develops its central characteristic: a “spirit of social cooperation and community life” (Dewey 1899, 14). That is why we conducted participatory action research in which teachers of a cooperation school faced the challenge of organizing dialogue in a religious celebration (Renkema, Mulder and Barnard 2018b). In the celebration, dialogue is expressed in another way than through the presentations that the teachers are used to. Students from 8-12 years old are gathered in the gym. Dialogue is structured: students sit together in small groups of 4-5 students, teachers ask pre-selected questions, and time is allotted. Some students (aged 11 and 12 years) have the role of moderators in the groups.

The dialogue between students deals with a poem, a story, and a video trailer, and discusses the following three questions: What do you see or hear? What do you feel or think when you see or hear this? Do you know other examples of this experience? The students discuss their answers to the three questions in their groups. Four teachers are present and contribute to the celebration by reading the poem or story, showing the trailer, asking the questions and collecting some

answers in the plenary assembly. The celebration ends with a drawing assignment that the students can do individually, in pairs or as a group. They are asked to draw their perceptions of one of the fragments that has been shown or read.

In this example from our participatory action research we recognize elements of a practice of community that enhances dialogue as an expression of encounter between students from different backgrounds.

Our fourth notion relates to Dewey's psychological aspect of democratic education. Learning from experience is a key concept of in Dewey's work. In our research, we also detected the valuation of the respondents of focusing on students' life experiences in the moments of contemplation and the celebrations (Renkema, Mulder and Barnard 2017, 2018b).

In this respect, there is a similarity between Dewey's perspective and that of the respondents. However, our empirical findings show an emphasis on stories and other contents of Christian tradition, more than on students' life experiences, in religious education (Renkema, Mulder and Barnard 2017, 2018a). Cooperation schools face the challenge of enhancing the emphasis on students' life experiences in religious education. Implementing this means that dialogue and encounter are fostered as central characteristics of the identity of cooperation schools: students identify more with these experiences, which stimulates dialogue.

It also means that equality, another central value of the schools (Renkema, Mulder and Barnard 2016), is expressed by focusing on these experiences, which are all worth exploring.

In religious education, students and teachers explore these life experiences and especially the "actual religious quality in the experience ... [as] ... the better adjustment in life and its conditions" (Dewey 1934, 14).

When cooperation schools implement this focus on the religious dimension of experience, they have to work towards a curriculum that is less oriented towards the knowledge of Christian traditions, or indeed, of a variety of faith traditions. Teaching into or teaching about one or more traditions is replaced by the creation of "an interpretative transformational process" (Sutinen, Kallioniemi and Pihlström

2015, 341) by bringing in “intellectual and moral resources which humanity has succeeded in getting together” (Dewey 1897, 1). In this line, it is noteworthy that in our participatory action research we found an absence of any reference to one or more religious traditions during the experimental celebration.

Teachers at the participating cooperation school also mentioned this as a point of improvement and expressed the desire to pay more attention to religious content. In this process, teachers show stories and other content from a variety of traditions to the students with the intention of contemplating and discussing life experiences in the traditions. This focus on experiences in the resources makes it possible for students to relate to them. These external stimuli are introduced into an interpretative dialogue with the students’ experiences and the religious dimension of those experiences. This way of dealing with religious sources and language does not imply a movement toward the use of secular content and language. In democratic education, dialogue about the personal experiences of students in relation to a variety of traditions can add to the encounter between non-affiliated students and students from a confessional background. In this way we can combine Dewey’s (and the teachers’) plea for the attention for religious experience in religious education with the teachers’ desire to pay attention to the content of a diversity of traditions and develop practices in which the dialogue about personal experiences of students in relation to traditions is organized.

5. *Practices of democracy*

Using the analogy between the key values of cooperation schools and Dewey’s view on democracy in education, we can sketch an outline of possible concrete practices of religious education at these schools. We make four suggestions, in which we also refer to empirical findings of our previous research.

First, schools that speak highly of living together and encounter and dialogue, such as the cooperation schools we investigated, can apply these principles to practices of commonality. In these Deweyan practices, communication is the central concept. It is this communication “which insures participation in a common understanding is one which secures similar emotional and intellectual dispositions” (Dewey 1980, 7). It is through communication, or dialogue, as we refer to it in our research, that a democratic means of encounter between students

is expressed and an embryonic society is shaped. Student participation in these practices of community is an essential element of Dewey's view. This also implies that the community is challenged to explore differences, as is underlined by our respondents (Renkema, Mulder and Barnard 2017). "This means that children should be able to participate in listening to peers with different faiths and critically engage as to the warrants behind such views. Faiths can be 'tested' with regard to examining their implications and differences with others" (Webster 2009, 100). In religious education, democratic practices of dialogue and exploring differences must be organized explicitly and intentionally to embody values of school identity and to foster the student's identity (Berding and Miedema 2007).

In outlining our second suggestion, we focus on existing practices of moments of contemplation and celebrations segregated according to public education and confessional denominations. Following Dewey's view on "a mode of associated living" (1980, 93), we point out that democratic school values of encounter and dialogue are expressed more evidently in collective religious education. This implies that the development of students' identity and their competences of respect and openness are fostered more firmly in moments of contemplation and celebration where students of all possible religious backgrounds are present and challenged to meet everyone. In his elaboration on Dewey's view on the teaching of religion in schools, Knight states vividly: "To teach each child in its own faith and in its own version of that faith risks the social harmony and tolerance at which education aims" (1998, 70). Teachers of cooperation schools are encouraged to express collective encounter without any restriction as a key value of their education.

Our third suggestion concerns the content of these communal practices. Other than a distinct result of our research, these moments of contemplation and celebration show no emphasis on any religious tradition. However, in line with Dewey's emphasis on the central place of the religious dimension of experience, these activities can enhance dialogue and encounter by focusing on this dimension in the life experiences of all students. The exploration of these experiences and the "actual religious quality in the experience" (Dewey 1934, 14) is then the subject. The teacher contributes to these activities by putting forward content of a variety of traditions and challenging the students to contemplate and to discuss the human life experiences in the sources. Traditions of belief and worldview are introduced to stimulate students to reflect on their life in an intersubjective and hermeneutical

process (Miedema 2014). Perspectives of the traditions encourage students to discuss and to reflect on “existential questions, meaning in life and the influence a worldview might (aim to) have in people’s and pupils’ lives” (Van der Kooij, De Ruyter and Miedema 2013). This focus on life experiences in traditions of belief and worldview has the potential to go beyond religious and denominational differences: “Many of us work with religious and non-religious students, and so an engagement with spirituality must be able to transcend this divide. This can be achieved through a focus upon experience, where attention is not so much given to its ‘truth’ but rather to how experiences are interpreted and given meaning” (Webster 2009, 97).

Because all students are encouraged to relate to these experiences and recognize them in their everyday life, school values of living together and encounter are manifested in religious practices: it is these experiences students that communicate about and try to understand in each other.

Fourth, the exploration of and the dialogue about this religious dimension of experience in collective practices can be enhanced by putting forward “the intellectual and moral resources which humanity has succeeded in getting together” (Dewey 1897, 1). These stimuli are introduced by teachers in such a way that every student is encouraged to relate them to his or her own life experiences. Questions that are raised by this process encourage students to communicate and explore commonalities and differences with others. When the content of these languages and symbols from outside the student originate from a variety of sources, teachers manifest equality of traditions and convictions as a key value of cooperation schools. When an emphasis on one specific tradition or source is abandoned, teachers also make it possible for every student to have a chance to feel acknowledged.



CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

1. *Relevance*

In our introduction section we described the actuality of cooperation schools in mostly rural areas in the Netherlands. The number of students in some of these areas is decreasing and schools in villages consider merging or merge because of this development.

In the years of our research we observed not only the rise in the number of cooperation schools but we also noticed a growing attention for this phenomenon and for our research in particular. As main researcher I have spoken with teachers, principals and directors of cooperation schools and school boards. These discussions took place for research objectives but also for reasons of valorization. Many of my discussion partners wanted to know about the results of my research in order to establish what they could mean for their own situation. That the attention for cooperation schools is increasing, can also be deduced from the discussions with representatives of the government and societal interest groups and interviews with media and platforms. Results of our research have been shared with a variety of groups and persons that have shown interest in the subject of identity and religious education of cooperation schools. The attention for cooperation schools in general and our research in particular is ongoing. We receive invitations for lecturers, workshops and counselling from a number of schools throughout the country.

Next to the growing number of cooperation schools we can explain this attention for and valorization of our research by pointing out another strength that we mentioned in our introduction section: we consequently investigated the relation between school values and the practice of (in our case) religious education. Consistencies or discrepancies in this relation are of interest for principals and teachers of cooperation schools that in most cases are rather new and are still faced with the challenge to develop their education. However, also cooperation schools that have merged several years ago feel the need for a continuing reflection on this relation. Our research has been able to shed (empirical and theoretical) light upon the challenges that come with this reflection and the development of good practices in line with the school values.

Although the phenomenon of the cooperation school is one of great interest, it should be noted that diversity in cooperation schools in the Netherlands is limited. In most cases the schools are visited by students from non-affiliated or Christian (Protestant or Catholic) background. Cooperation schools hardly appear in cities where a large cultural and religious diversity is significant and of importance for education. Therefore we can only add to theory about encounter in plural classrooms by our unique focus on the plurality of classes with mainly Christian and non-affiliated students. We are aware that plurality with a bigger variety of traditions in the student population has similar but also other specific challenges.

2. Research findings

This research aimed at answering the following research question: *What is the identity of Dutch cooperation schools, how do teachers express the identity in religious education, and how does the education meet the requirements of a democratic, plural society?*

We discovered that the value of encounter determines the identity of the schools, that respondents and school documents mention equality as an important condition for handling diversity and that respondents see their educational values expressed in religious education. Regarding religious education we detected that the value of encounter is hardly expressed by practicing dialogue in moments of contemplation and celebrations, that respondents emphasize the discussing of themes from the student's life experiences as a way of fostering encounter and dialogue between students from different backgrounds and that content of religious education explicitly focuses on the Christian tradition.

We described the practices of religious education and described and explained the values that ground the teachers' organization of this education. By investigating both the religious education and its founding values we shed light on the coherence between the values and this education. Next to this we contributed to the development of the practice of religious education in the unique plural setting of cooperation schools. We did so by formulating conclusions and recommendations regarding this coherence and related these to theory about encounter and dialogue in religious education. The conclusions and recommendations can help schools that are faced with discrepancies

concerning the relation between values and practice. And next to these, we designed a participatory action research in order to detect what motivations and challenges teachers face when they are asked to create an experimental celebration that can help them expressing their values in everyday practice. We distinguished the following sub-questions:

- a) How do cooperation schools construct their identity and what are the implications of this identity for the organization of religious education?
- b) How are the key values of a cooperation school and of its teachers exerted in the practice of religious education?
- c) How do teachers of cooperation schools express school values and their vision on encounter and dialogue in segregated moments of contemplation and in the organization and performance of a collective celebration?
- d) What are the teachers' motives for pursuing an experimental celebration at a cooperation school, what concepts and design requirements are involved, and how can this celebration be evaluated from a theory of dialogue and from the teachers' perspective?
- e) What is the contribution of Dewey's concept of democracy to the reflection on values and religious education at cooperation schools?

As described in the conceptual framework of our introduction chapter we studied two theoretical aspects of school identity: values concerning religious diversity and religious education. We considered both the dealing with religious diversity and the concept of religious education as identity markers of the school. We will now elaborate on these concepts by making clear what results we detected concerning these concepts and we relate them to scientific discourse.

2.1. Values concerning religious diversity in cooperation schools

Our research about the values of cooperation schools for educating concentrated on two sources: key values of the school identity as formulated in formal documents of the schools and key values of the school identity as described by principals and teachers. We have three findings to present concerning the values of cooperation schools.

First, formal school documents, teachers and principals describe a cooperation school as a community where living together is to be practiced and, in line with this perspective, emphasize the school value of encounter in education in general

and religious education in particular. Cooperation schools interpret themselves as schools that emphasize social values of community. This value of encounter determines the identity of these schools.

We connected this value of encounter to corresponding theory on values concerning religious diversity in education. By doing so we position ourselves as researchers who appreciate plurality in classes as a condition that fosters the development of students' identity. Differences in ideas and beliefs are to be explored in order to create mutual understanding on the one hand and to provide enrichment for personal identity development on the other (Ipgrave 2004; Schreiner 2006a). Encounter serves the ultimate goal of educating young people in order to prepare them to live in a plural society (Miedema and Ter Avest 2011; Schreiner 2006a; Keaten and Soukup 2009; Leganger-Krogstad 2003). Different scholars state that, by practicing encounter with others, differing in views and convictions, the student reflects on his personal views and convictions (Roebben 2000; Elias 2010; Orteza Y Miranda 2010). Following the views of Jackson (1997) and Roebben (2002), we consider dialogue as an extremely important aspect of religious education that is based on the value of encounter in religiously diverse classes. This implies a teacher who is competent in facilitating dialogue and who underlines the conviction that the value of encounter can only be expressed when the personal views of the students are explored on an equal bases and that the teacher is one of the participants (Heimbrock 2009).

We regard the aspects of encounter and dialogue of the school as a community as the social perspective of the schools. Other values that are related to the social perspective include working together, respecting differences, mutual understanding, and interaction. We recognize the social perspective in values of the school identity as formulated in formal school documents and in the personal and professional views of the respondents when they indicated their values for educating. The social value of the cooperation school not only connect school documents and the respondents' views. It is also a perspective on educating students that unites teachers who identify with or are responsible for secular worldview education with teachers who are responsible for Christian worldview education.

Our second finding concerns equality as another value for educating students at cooperation schools. In the context of the specific diversity of students from secular

and from Christian education we see that respondents and school documents speak highly of equality as an important condition for handling this diversity and for practicing encounter in education. Our empirical sources underline the value of equality for two reasons. We connect these reasons to theory about religious education in the context of plurality.

First, teachers, principals and school documents interpret their school as a place where all students and teachers are regarded as equal and where no worldview or religion determines all of the education, nor the admittance of students and teachers. The cooperation school as a community and a place for living together can only be expressed when all worldviews and perspectives are worth exploring (Wright 2004; Mulder 2012) and every student and teacher feels invited to bring in his or her view. Students and teachers are “challenged into incorporating those perspectives into their own or their group’s understanding” (Elias 2010, 70).

Second, equality means also that the sources for religious education must become more and more plural. Equality as a value for cooperation schools implies, both in our data and in theory about religious education in heterogeneous settings, that no specific religious tradition or perspective plays a dominant role: as researchers we regard diversity as an opportunity to create dialogue between students and a variety of sources. This dialogue and variety are key components in the identity formation of students. When no tradition or perspective is dominant, also the ideas and beliefs of the teacher and the basic confession of the school are no longer the dominant content (Miedema 2000; Heimbrock 2009). The objective of religious education has changed: the “subjective religiosity of the student” (Van der Zee, Hermans, and Aarnoutse 2004, 80) is the centre of identity formation. This means that the student actively participates in a hermeneutic practice by giving meaning to religious content in relation to personal existential questions (Jackson 1997; Miedema 2000; Van der Zee, Hermans, and Aarnoutse 2004). The student is the center of religious education processes. We recognize this focus on students’ life experiences in our empirical data: teachers emphasize their objective to pay central attention to the worldview of their students in religious education.

A third finding is the connection that the respondents experience between the school values and their educational practice: they see their educational values and those of formal school documents expressed in religious education, which consists

of the moments of contemplation and of celebrations. The teachers and principals recognize school values in practices of religious education where students from non-affiliated and Christian backgrounds come together.

Moreover, the respondents from schools where religious education classes divide students in groups along the lines of denomination also identify the social perspective in this practice. In our research we investigated whether and where we recognize the connection between school values and religious education.

These findings made us curious about the implementation of the school values in religious education.

2.2. *Religious education*

We formulate three findings regarding religious education at cooperation schools. In our empirical instruments as well as in our analysis we interpret religious education as that type of education that deals with student's identity development by engaging with, reflecting on and communicating about religious and secular traditions and sources that provide a view on life, living together and the world to which the student can relate and respond to. In religious education the sources and traditions foster every student's personal answers and questions concerning life, living together and the world. In our interpretation of religious education we identify the context of diversity in the Netherlands as a challenge as well as an opportunity for religious education (Ipgrave 2004). Religious education aims at creating an attitude of receptivity in the development of students' identity. We see this as the substantive core of religious education, which enables students to explore a variety of sources of meaning, and to encounter these differences (Wright 2004).

Our first finding concerns the element of dialogue in religious education. As stated, respondents view the social perspective as a very important characteristic: the school as a community. However, this perspective and especially the value of encounter are hardly expressed by practicing dialogue in moments of contemplation and celebrations. Dialogue is limited because of the segregated moments of contemplation at many cooperation schools, following the distinction between public education and confessional denominations. We also see this distinction in collective celebrations of schools where religious education is segregated: students from secular worldview education present to all other students, as do students

from Christian formation education. And dialogue is not put into practice in the didactics of the moments of contemplation nor in the celebrations. In this finding we detect a discrepancy with both the school values of encounter and equality as well as with theory about religious education in a plural context. The first discrepancy concerns the relation with the school values: respondents speak highly of encounter and equality in education but they hardly organize didactics in religious education in which views of other students and from a variety of sources is explored and, therefore, these values are expressed. We also relate the discrepancy to theory. The emphasis on dialogue in religious education calls for non-segregated classes: “My impression is that a multireligious (and intercultural) make-up of the classes provides the best preconditions with regard to dialogue and encounter in RE. A separation of the pupils according to confessions and religions would therefore no longer be desirable” (Weisse 2009, 124). In our research, we ask questions about the separation of students, and underline “cooperative learning” (Van der Zee, Hermans, and Aarnoutse 2004, 82) as a didactic and organizational consequence for religious education that stimulates dialogue.

As a second finding, respondents from both non-affiliated and Christian backgrounds think highly of discussing themes from the student’s life experiences in religious education. They value this principle because the themes can foster encounter and dialogue between students from different backgrounds. All students can identify with general existential themes and therefore add to the dialogue. In chapter 3 we have seen this focus in moments of contemplation and in the perception of religious education by the teachers. Our fourth chapter showed that the attention for students’ life experiences is limited in school celebrations. In the new designed celebration in our participatory action research (chapter 5), teachers did pay attention to the students’ worldview, and also valued this attention highly in their view on celebrations. In our analysis of this attention we noticed a resemblance with theory about religious education. This theory underlines the correlation between dealing with diversity in classes and the attention for students’ life experiences. Plurality in classrooms can only be visible when due attention is paid to students’ personal views, beliefs, and life experiences. Encounter in plural settings is fostered when students meet in the dialogue about experiences that are recognizable for them all (Schreiner 2006b; Jackson 2004).

Our final finding addresses the content of the moments of contemplation and celebrations. In these practices of religious education, we see an explicit focus on the Christian tradition. This focus is appreciated by teachers from both non-affiliated and Christian backgrounds. According to the respondents this way this tradition can be explored more in depth. They also motivate this focus because of the preferences of parents. The prioritization of Christian sources is not only expressed in collective moments of contemplation, but also in the practice of segregated moments of contemplation and celebrations like the feasts of Christmas and Easter. Respondents indicate that this explicit attention for Christian tradition is a deliberate policy, which is valued by parents.

We mention two theoretical perspectives that question the focus on one specific religious tradition in religious education.

First, we mention the perspective of the plural society in which students are educated. Most western societies are religiously plural (Jackson 2006) and are faced with the challenge and the opportunity to handle this plurality (Rautionmaa and Kallioniemi 2017). Schools play a role in this challenge (Ipgrave 2004), in teaching students to deal with this diversity with respect and understanding (Miedema and Ter Avest 2011; Elias 2010; Keaten and Soukup 2009; Rautionmaa and Kallioniemi 2017). This means that, “i(I)n order to truly take account of plurality as a basis for integrative RE, any attempts to make particular religious traditions the general framework of integrative RE have to be avoided” (Alberts 2007, 357). Similarly, Sutinen et al. related their disapproval of educating students in one specific religion to their critical view on separated classes, which “is not very suitable for societies where one of the main problems is increasing social cohesion” (Sutinen, Kallioniemi, and Pihlström 2015, 330). We also recognize this appreciation of educating students in a variety of traditions in our empirical data: especially the transfer of knowledge about different worldviews and religions is mentioned by the teachers. This view of the respondents seems inconsistent with the focus on the Christian tradition in religious education, as it is practiced and motivated by the respondents.

Second, the student’s dialogue with a variety of religious sources is seen as a valuable contribution to his or her identity development (Roebben 2000; Elias 2010; Orteza Y Miranda 2010; Rautionmaa and Kallioniemi 2017). When a student is exposed

to a plurality of sources and perspectives in religious education it “may open up new horizons and enlarge the inclusiveness of a certain perspective” (Wardekker and Miedema 2001b, 77). A central role for the life experiences of students in religious education fosters the dialogue (Schreiner 2006b; Jackson 2004). But a central role of one specific religious tradition seems to limit this dialogue and encounter.

2.3. *A democratic practice*

We discovered how school values concerning religious diversity and religious education are related. The relation concerns the first two aspects of our research question: what is the identity of Dutch cooperation schools and how do teachers express the identity in religious education? A third important aspect of our research was the question whether the religious education at cooperation schools meets the requirements of a democratic, plural society. We contributed to the reflection of this coherence and to the improvement of value-based religious education at a cooperation school in two ways.

First, we conducted a participatory action research in which teachers of one cooperation school designed an experimental celebration, expressing the value of dialogue. Their challenge was to shape a new practice of religious education that offers a direction for resolving the discrepancy between school values and the lived practice. In this new practice the characteristics of dialogue should play an important role. The resulting educational practice told us more about the motivation for and content of religious activities involving plurality and dialogue. In the participatory action research process that led to the experiment, we intentionally and repeatedly introduced the concept of dialogue to reflect on. By doing so we made clear how this concept is interpreted and developed by the teachers. In this stage of our research we emphasized dialogue as an important aspect of religious education in a plural setting. We did so based on the two theoretical perspectives that underline the importance of dialogue, as described in 2.2. We concluded that a practice of dialogue can be organized in line with school values, that dialogue as a conversational process between students with different views can be organized, but that the expression of dialogue in practice is limited: there was no focus on any central existential theme that is explored by a variety of perspectives and the dialogue is not moderated professionally.

Second, we contributed to the reflection of the coherence between school values and religious education by incorporating Dewey's concept of democracy. We added this concept because it supports the debate about the lack of consistency between school values and educational practice with a theoretical view on values that are the basis of cooperation schools and with concrete suggestions for enhancing the values-based and dialogical practice of religious education. We recognized the parallel between Dewey's dominant focus on education in the context of plurality and acting as a community (Biesta and Miedema 1999), encounter and equality as key values of cooperation schools and our focus as researchers on values that we described as democratic in chapter 6. By choosing these democratic values we take position by identifying schools (and cooperation school in particular) as embryonic communities in which students can learn from each other and can develop to become respectful human beings and are willing to encounter a diversity of perspectives (Sutinen, Kallioniemi, and Pihlström 2015; Webster 2009; Knight 1998).

3. *Answers to the research question*

3.1. *Empirical answers*

Our research investigated the following question: *What is the identity of Dutch cooperation schools, how do teachers express the identity in religious education, and how does the education meet the requirements of a democratic, plural society?*

We showed our main findings in the previous section. We answer our research question by stating that respondents and documents of the cooperation schools find it important that their students learn to understand each other and learn to live together, respecting differences: we have noted this as the social perspective of cooperation schools. We detected a strong focus on encounter and equality as main values, in the context of the unique diversity of these schools. The emphasis on these values is a significant commonality of the investigated cooperation schools. Concerning the organization of religious education and the expression of the value of equality in this education we noticed a focus on the Christian tradition, in different forms of religious education. We asked questions about the coherence between this focus and the value of equality and the correlation with the plurality in these schools and in society. We also detected a discrepancy between dialogue, as an important way of expressing the value of encounter, and the concrete practices

of the moments of contemplation and celebrations. Most of these practices were organized separately for students from secular education and students from Christian education. It seems that in most schools the distinction between the two former identities of the merged schools are maintained in religious education. We contributed to the coherence between values in religious education by implementing dialogue in a new experiment at one cooperation school by a participatory action research. In the final phase of our research we used Dewey's concept of democracy in order to position cooperation schools as places where religious education fosters the identity development of students in a hermeneutical way and, by doing so, expresses the educational values of the cooperation schools in the context of a democratic, plural society.

3.2. *Theoretical contribution*

We conducted our research in the context of theory about religious education in plural classes and about encounter and dialogue in these classes. These theoretical insights structured our empirical instruments and our conclusions. Our findings contribute to this theory and the current academic discourse about encounter in religious diverse classes. This contribution is threefold.

First, we started from the theoretical perspective that, especially in classrooms where diversity is apparent, there is "discrepancy between the official identity of the school as it is formulated in official documents, and every day practice" (Ter Avest et al. 2007, 250). Our research contributes to the current academic discourse on school identity, diversity and religious education (e.g. Faber 2012; Rautionmaa and Kallioniemi 2017; Ipgrave 2004) by elaborating on the values that the teachers of cooperation schools hold dear, how they motivate the coherence between their values and religious education and how they explain possible discrepancies between the values and this practice. Our research shows whether this discrepancy is visible in the practice of the cooperation school, how it is motivated and how concrete activities of teachers can develop practices that can resolve this discrepancy.

Our research develops a perspective on the (lack of) coherence between school values and the practice of religious education (Keast and Leganger-Krogstad 2004). So, our research contributes to the current theoretical discourse about the relation between values and practice by showing that this specific pluralization of cooperation schools indeed influences this relation strongly.

Therefore, we underline our statement in our introduction chapter: the coherence between school values on the one hand and the practice of (religious) education on the other hand is a main challenge of every school but especially of the cooperation school. In the line of the results of our research in the participating schools we contribute to the coherence between values and religious education by analyzing the teachers' design of such a practice of encounter. Our results help us understand why and how teachers deal with their values in religious education in a context of plurality.

Our second contribution concentrates on the specific and unique plurality in classes of cooperation schools. In publications on encounter in religious education we found a focus on dialogue between students from different confessional backgrounds and affiliations (Vermeer 2004; Valk 2017; Rautionmaa and Kallioniemi 2017). In these publications the authors promote religious education that aims at seeking out and comparing “common positions, around which the variety of faiths, spiritual traditions and non-religious traditions can develop common thinking and action towards common goals” (Rautionmaa and Kallioniemi 2017, 153).

However, in most schools in the Netherlands and especially in cooperation schools many students are non-affiliated: they are not socialized in any confessional tradition at all. Our research contributes to theoretical views about interfaith education and the encounter between representants of confessional traditions by focusing on the values, the content and the organization of religious education that aims at the encounter between students from a non-affiliated background and those with a confessional background. We have seen that underlying values are very much similar compared to the values of interfaith education but that the content and the organization differs in some practices of cooperation schools. Our third contribution to the current theoretical discourse is the reflection on the concrete dialogical practices. As Rautionmaa and Kallioniemi point out there “is an obvious lack of theoretical reflection about what inter-worldview dialogue involves at the school level” (2017, 156). Our research fills this theoretical gap by showing what teachers do in the concrete practice of the inter-worldview dialogue and how they motivate their practices. We show what is done when teachers of cooperation schools practice what theoretical views emphasize, in the line of Dewey: organizing concrete practices of dialogue in order to facilitate encounter as being relevant for democratic and interreligious education (Sutinen, Kallioniemi

and Pihlström 2015; Ghiloni 2011; Berding and Miedema 2007). Our research gives insight in the way dialogue in the context of plurality is organized and what values and motives structure these practices. We detected that this dialogue in religious education is limited. We investigated what reasons our respondents mentioned for this limitation and we dealt with this limitations by stimulating teachers to develop a concrete dialogical practice and by bringing in the perspective of Dewey.

4. *Further research*

The research about cooperation schools produced results that originated from the concrete field of school values and religious education. The results from our research have generated the following points that, in our view, need to be investigated.

For the case studies in our research we explored several cooperation schools. However, these were all the results of a merger between a public and a protestant school. No schools of public-catholic origin participated. Only in the first phase principals of this category participated in the survey (chapter 2). Also a non-response investigation confirmed our finding that all schools, from every origin, found their education on the key values of encounter and equality. However, we also detected data for our presumption that the practice of religious education is organized otherwise at these schools of a public-catholic origin: collective religious education for all students appears to be more common (chapter 2). This is a promising result that requires further research that could find out whether there is a distinction between cooperation schools from a public-catholic origin and from a public-protestant origin. Do they translate their values differently into the practice of religious education?

The same question can be asked to cooperation schools for secondary education. In our research we only investigated schools for primary education. Can we detect resemblances and differences when it comes to key values, moments of contemplation and celebrations at secondary cooperation schools?

Our second question deals with the groups of respondents. We only investigated teachers and principals, being the professionals who are responsible for value based education. Also the celebration that was the product of our participatory action research (chapter 5) was organized by teachers. We recommend further

research among other stakeholders of cooperation schools: the students and the parents. Students always are the object of education and religious education in particular and parents are mentioned as a reason for organizing religious education the way it is. Involving these groups will provide us with more understanding of their perception of the school values and the way they translate these values to concrete practices of (religious) education. Will they interpret these values in another way or will they bring in other characteristics of religious education than the professionals do? In a concrete sense this will mean that students and parents will also participate in participatory action research that leads to a practice that expresses their interpretation. Moreover, involving students in further research will tell us more about their unique and personal religious views: what can we say about the articulation of their religious views that are put forward in dialogue? In our research we divided students of cooperation school into two groups: Christian and non-affiliated.

However, we are aware of the spectrum between these two views. Every class of a cooperation school is a plural group that cannot be divided into only two distinct groups that are very much separated from each other. Every student develops his own religious view. However, in our research we investigated the common practice and wishes of cooperation schools and their stakeholders that are characterized by a clear distinction into two identities: a non-affiliated that corresponds with the former public school and a Christian that resembles the merged Christian school. Finally, further research should aim at the religious experience of students, not as an alternative for the attention for religious traditions in classrooms, but as content that stimulates the process of giving meaning to traditions. In our participatory action research (chapter 5) we found an absence of any reference to one or more religious traditions during the experimental celebration. Teachers of this participating cooperation school also mentioned this as a point of improvement. Could it be that Dewey's vision on religious experience in education can be complemented by a hermeneutical contribution of various religious traditions? We are curious how this hermeneutical contribution can be implemented in the practice of a cooperation school. This could contribute to our aforementioned statement that there is still much work to be done to promote religious education that aims at the encounter between non-affiliated students and students from a confessional background. Could the dialogue about personal experiences of students in relation to a variety of traditions add to this encounter? This way we can combine Dewey's (and the teachers') plea for the attention for religious

experience in religious education with the wish of teachers to pay attention to the content of a religious tradition (chapter 5) and to a diversity of traditions (chapter 3). Therefore, we recommend more action research with teachers (and possibly students and parents) to develop practices in which the dialogue about personal experiences of students in relation to traditions is expressed. In such a research also another question that is addressed in the discussion about our action research (chapter 5) can be answered: what can be the role of a supervisor in action research, especially when it comes to discussing a discrepancy between institutional values and educational practices and how can ownership in defining the problem and in the research activities and research process be put in the hands of the professionals?

5. *Reflection on our research*

Looking back on our research, we recognize a few strengths and some limitations. First, we mention three strengths.

As a strength we note that the choice for the cooperation school as research subject was a good one. The phenomenon is upcoming, has a unique setting of plurality and gets more and more attention of schools, school boards and politicians. Our research was the first academic research that studied the values, as they are formulated and practiced in religious education, of this specific kind of school. Our choice for cooperation schools as research subject adds to theory about religious education in plural settings by incorporating non-affiliated students. It is a unique characteristic of the type of schools that religious education is provided for and encounter can be fostered between students from confessional backgrounds and students who are non-affiliated.

Second, we see it as a strength that we investigated the coherence between values and the practice of religious education. We could place these findings in the context of theory about religious education in a plural setting. Investigating the expression of school values in the concrete practice of religious education has provided insight into this kind of value-based education in the context of a specific kind of diversity. We have been able to explore the organization of religious education in this context and the motives that grounded this organization. Our study of the coherence between school values and religious education has shown

discrepancies and possibilities to construct a more balanced correlation. This way we provide teachers and principals of cooperation schools with concrete suggestions for their educational practice in dealing with the correlation. Our third strength is a methodical one. We used a variety of empirical instruments by which we could not only identify the values of respondents by interviewing them but also the implementation of the values in religious education by observing concrete practices. And next to the analysis of the current practices and ideas, we also contributed to these by organizing participatory action research.

We mention three limitations of our research. We see the unique kind of diversity of cooperation schools also as a limitation. As mentioned before, cooperation schools mainly exist in rural areas of the Netherlands. Theory about religious education in the context of diversity and about plural western societies mostly discusses a diversity of multiple religious traditions. This diversity is put forward as most challenging and necessary. However, this kind of diversity is not applicable to most cooperation schools because of demographic reasons. We therefore need to underline this reservation when we describe the diversity of cooperation schools. Our subject of the cooperation school has its own unique plural setting. A second limitation is the number of participating schools. In phase 1, 17 schools filled in the questionnaire and they were almost all the result of a merger between a Protestant and a public school. A small minority of Roman Catholic-public cooperation schools participated. Due to practical reasons in phase 2 and phase 4 only one school was included in the case studies, which of course makes comparison impossible.

We intended to compare two schools in the participative action research for organizing an experiment with dialogue in religious education. We tried to select a school that organizes moments of contemplation in a segregated way and one that offers collective religious education. However, none of the schools with collective religious education that we contacted felt the need or had time to participate. Therefore, we had no opportunity to investigate how these two distinct types of cooperation school relate when they were challenged to express dialogue in a new practice. The third limitation concerns the participative action research and the role of the researcher in phase 4. For organizing the experiment of the new celebration the researcher emphasized the concept of dialogue. This influenced the final script of the celebration. Although the participants valued the process of organizing the

celebration and were willing to maintain this practice in their curriculum, we can pose a question regarding the possible limitations in ownership of this experiment by the teachers themselves.

6. *Final words*

At the end of our research we mention all the teachers and principals of cooperation schools. The professionals who are proud to work at their cooperation school. Who connect their values for educating their students with their personal way of looking at life. We hope that our research contributes to their everyday practice and their reflection on the question of what matters in this education. We wish that this practice of religious education at cooperation schools may provide students “with opportunities to exchange their ideas, to share their personal experiences, discover the other, and gives them the possibility to challenge their own perceptions” (Rautionmaa and Kallioniemi 2017, 152).





NEDERLANDSE SAMENVATTING
LIST OF PUBLICATIONS
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
BIBLIOGRAPHY
CURRICULUM VITAE

Nederlandse samenvatting

1. Aanleiding, onderzoeksprobleem en onderzoeksvraag

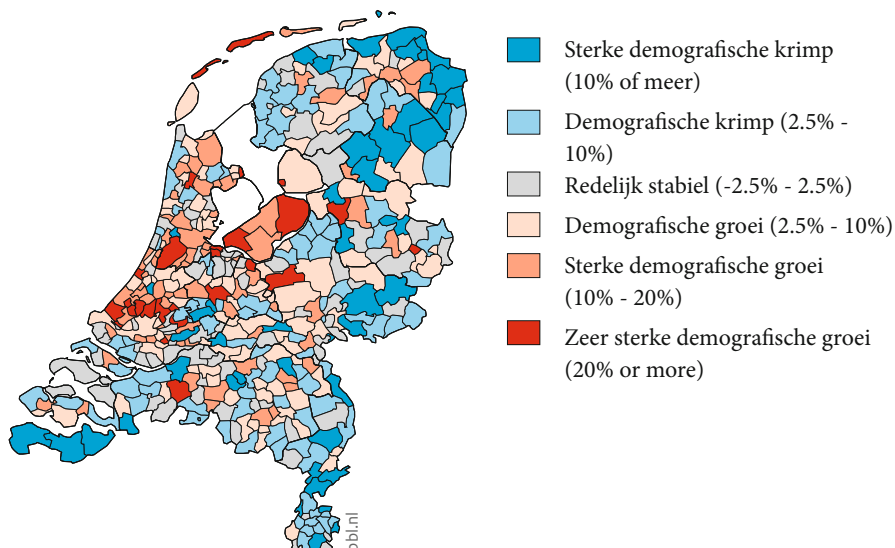
Samenwerkingsscholen zijn een betrekkelijk nieuw fenomeen in het Nederlandse onderwijssysteem. In vrijwel alle gevallen is een school in Nederland óf een school voor bijzonder onderwijs óf een openbare school. Dit duaal onderwijssysteem heeft betrekking op alle niveaus van onderwijs: van basisscholen tot universiteiten. De openbare school is in levensbeschouwelijke zin neutraal: ze kan haar onderwijs niet baseren vanuit één enkele levensbeschouwelijke traditie. De openbare school benadert levensbeschouwelijke visies van leerlingen, leerkrachten en in de samenleving op actief pluriforme wijze (Veugelers en De Kat 2005). Dit blijkt bijvoorbeeld uit het open toelatingsbeleid van leerlingen en het open benoemingsbeleid van personeel, ongeacht hun culturele, etnische of levensbeschouwelijke achtergrond (Bakker 2012; Zoontjens 2003; Ter Avest 2003).

Een school voor bijzonder onderwijs wordt gesticht vanuit particulier initiatief en baseert haar onderwijs op een levensbeschouwelijke traditie (Zoontjens 2003). Karakteristiek voor het Nederlands onderwijssysteem is het recht van zowel bijzonder als openbaar onderwijs om in gelijke mate subsidie van de overheid te ontvangen (Zoontjens 2003). Ongeveer 67% van alle scholen zijn scholen voor bijzonder onderwijs, in de meeste gevallen katholiek of protestant-christelijk (Bakker 2011). In zowel de meeste openbare scholen als de meeste scholen voor bijzonder onderwijs is de leerlingenpopulatie in levensbeschouwelijk opzicht heterogeen (Bakker 2011; Ter Avest et al. 2007).

Samenwerkingsscholen zijn het resultaat van een fusie tussen een (of meerdere) openbare school en een (of meerdere) school voor bijzonder onderwijs. De karakteristieken die eigen zijn aan elke oorspronkelijke school, zoals hierboven kort geschetst, komen samen in een nieuwe school: een samenwerkingsschool. Hierdoor wordt de diversiteit van de leerlingenpopulatie vergroot. We zien vooral een toename van samenwerkingsscholen in de zogenoemde krimpgebieden in Nederland: in die gebieden is een afname van het aantal inwoners en daarmee ook van het aantal leerlingen te herkennen. We zien deze ontwikkeling van demografische krimp op de volgende kaart:

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Dat de meeste samenwerkingsscholen ontstaan en bestaan in plattelandsgebieden is een belangrijk contextueel gegeven voor ons onderzoek. Dit betekent namelijk dat de meeste leerlingen van seculiere, protestant-christelijke of katholieken huize komen. Leerlingen met bijvoorbeeld een islamitische of hindoeïstische achtergrond vormen een kleine minderheid op deze scholen.



Figuur 1. Demografische ontwikkelingen in Nederland 2010-2040 (Ritsema van Eck et al. 2013)

Zo'n samenwerkingsschool kent de uitdaging om een identiteit van de school te verwoorden waarin alle leerkrachten, ouders en leerlingen zich kunnen herkennen. Daarin speelt de vertaling van die schoolidentiteit naar het levensbeschouwelijk onderwijs een belangrijke rol. In dit proces nemen leerkrachten, ouders en leerlingen allen hun eigen levensbeschouwelijke overtuiging en ook hun persoonlijke voorkeur voor waardengeladen onderwijs mee. Samenwerkingsscholen kennen hierdoor ook een unieke diversiteit: betrokkenen met een voorkeur voor openbaar onderwijs vormen één school met leerkrachten, ouders en leerlingen met een voorkeur voor bijzonder onderwijs. Zowel bij de totstandkoming van de nieuwe school als bij de verdergaande ontwikkeling van de school speelt deze specifieke diversiteit een belangrijke rol. Daarmee komen in het onderwijs dus (veelal) godsdienstige waarden samen met seculiere waarden. Dan is het interessant om te zien welke waarden als gemeenschappelijk worden beschouwd en hoe vanuit gemeenschappelijke

waarden levensbeschouwelijk onderwijs wordt gemotiveerd en georganiseerd. In ons onderzoek zijn wij benieuwd naar de waarden die op het onderwijs op deze gefuseerde school van invloed zijn en naar de vertaling van deze waarden in het levensbeschouwelijk onderwijs. Wij richten ons hierbij op samenwerkingsscholen voor primair onderwijs en op de visie en de rol van de leerkracht.

Onze onderzoeksvraag luidt: Wat is de identiteit van Nederlandse samenwerkingsscholen, hoe drukken leerkrachten deze identiteit uit in levensbeschouwelijk onderwijs en hoe verhoudt dit onderwijs zich tot een democratisch en plurale samenleving?

Met het beantwoorden van deze vraag beoogden we de praktijk van het levensbeschouwelijk onderwijs te beschrijven en de waarden die dit levensbeschouwelijk onderwijs en het onderwijs in het algemeen op de samenwerkingsschool richting geven te duiden.

Daarnaast dragen we als onderzoekers bij aan het verband tussen waarden en het levensbeschouwelijk onderwijs door theoretische inzichten over ontmoeting en dialoog in de context van pluraliteit in te brengen en door, samen met leerkracht, een nieuwe praktijk te ontwerpen.

2. Theoretische achtergrond

Dit onderzoek vindt plaats tegen de achtergrond van de pluraliteit van de leerlingenpopulatie van de samenwerkingsschool voor primair onderwijs. De identiteit van de school wordt gekenmerkt door een, in paragraaf 1 geschetste, unieke pluraliteit: het samengaan van leerlingen, leerkrachten en ouders met seculiere en met godsdienstige waarden. Daarbij dienen we te benadrukken dat de personen met seculiere waarden niet uitsluitend en per definitie vertegenwoordigers van openbaar onderwijs zijn en dat zij met godsdienstige waarden niet uitsluitend en per definitie bijzonder onderwijs vertegenwoordigen. Maar deze pluraliteit is wel herkenbaar in de samenwerkingsschool en bepaalt ook mede de invulling van de schoolidentiteit.

Tegen die achtergrond is ook theoretisch onderzoek gedaan naar ontmoeting, dialoog en de identiteitsontwikkeling van leerlingen. In die theorie wordt de rol



van levensbeschouwelijke educatie in een plurale context benadrukt (Schreiner 2006a). Daarbinnen wordt dialoog als een zeer belangrijke factor beschouwd: de plurale context van school en samenleving daagt de leerlingen uit een ander in dialoog te ontmoeten (Keaten and Soukup 2009; Leganger-Krogstad 2003). De ontmoeting en de dialoog in het onderwijs wordt door de theorie als zeer waardevol gezien om twee redenen. In de eerste plaats leveren ze een belangrijke bijdrage aan de identiteitsontwikkeling van de leerlingen: de ontmoeting met een ander of zelfs vreemd gezichtspunt kan de leerling uitnodigen te reflecteren op zijn/haar persoonlijke overtuiging en deze eventueel te wijzigingen of opnieuw te onderstrepen (Elias 2010; Vermeer 2004; Rautionmaa and Kallioniemi 2017). Daarnaast stimuleren ontmoeting en dialoog een houding van openheid en tolerantie bij de leerling (Elias 2010) en kunnen er daardoor verbindingen worden gelegd tussen mensen met verschillende visies op leven (Miedema and Ter Avest, 2011; Rautionmaa and Kallioniemi 2017).

3. *Methodes en resultaten*

Dit onderzoek is voor het overgrote deel een kwalitatief onderzoek. We volgden daarin met name twee methodes. In de eerste plaats was dit de vragenlijst die directeuren van samenwerkingsscholen tussen februari en mei 2013 hebben ingevuld. Ten tweede hebben we, op basis van en als verdieping van deze resultaten uit de vragenlijst, 5 case studies uitgevoerd. Dit vond plaats in de periode van begin 2014 tot begin 2017.

Deze dissertatie bevat 5 hoofdstukken. Deze worden ingeleid en afgesloten door een introductie- en een discussiehoofdstuk. Elk van de 5 artikelen is gepubliceerd of ingediend in internationale, wetenschappelijke tijdschriften voor levensbeschouwelijke educatie.

Hoofdstuk 2 beschrijft de analyse van het eerste deel van ons onderzoek: de online verkenning van de kernwaarden en het levensbeschouwelijk onderwijs van de breedte van de Nederlandse samenwerkingsscholen voor primair onderwijs. De waarden en de praktijk die we hiermee in kaart brachten vormden de basis voor het verdiepend onderzoek dat daarop volgde. Onze analyse van de resultaten van een vragenlijst bracht in de eerste plaats aan het licht dat directeuren hun onderwijs met name baseren op de waarden van gelijkwaardigheid en ontmoeting. Ten tweede bleek dat ze zowel openbaar als bijzonder onderwijs op hun samenwerkingsschool

kunnen onderscheiden. En in de derde plaats zagen we ook dat een groot aantal scholen hun levensbeschouwelijk onderwijs inrichten langs de lijnen van de oorspronkelijke (confessionele of openbare) identiteit van de gefuseerde scholen.

Hoofdstuk 3 geeft de analyse van de case study van één school weer: een school die het levensbeschouwelijk onderwijs gezamenlijk, dus voor alle kinderen samen, organiseert. Naast interviews in focusgroepen observeerden we de praktijk van de levensbeschouwelijke dagopening. We gingen hierbij op zoek naar de samenhang tussen de kernwaarden die door leerkrachten worden genoemd en die praktijk. Onze analyse toonde aan dat de zowel de schooldocumenten als de leerkrachten het sociale aspect van onderwijs, de ontmoeting en het samenleven, als kernwaarde van de school beschouwden. Daarnaast zagen we ook een discrepantie tussen de waarde van ontmoeting en de alledaagse praktijk: zo werd er nauwelijks ingezet op dialoog tussen leerlingen tijdens de dagopening. Ook de aandacht voor levenservaringen van leerlingen, die door de respondenten van belang werd geacht, werd nauwelijks in die praktijk tot uiting gebracht.

In hoofdstuk 4 presenteren we de derde fase van ons onderzoek: case studies van 4 scholen. In het bijzonder onderzochten we hier hoe de schoolwaarden werden uitgedrukt in gesegregeerde dagopeningen en in gezamenlijke vieringen en wat er te zeggen was over de samenhang tussen deze waarden en deze praktijken voor levensbeschouwelijk onderwijs. Deze aandacht voor gesegregeerde momenten was nodig omdat in fase 1 al bleek dat deze organisatie van gescheiden levensbeschouwelijk onderwijs een dominante was. Ook in dit onderzoek hechtten de leerkrachten belang aan de kernwaarde van ontmoeting als kenmerk van hun samenwerkingsschool. Maar ook aan het eind van dit onderzoek stelden we vragen over de gelimiteerde organisatie van dialoog in zowel de dagopeningen als de vieringen. Net als in fase 2 zagen we hier wel de waardering voor de aandacht voor levenservaringen in het levensbeschouwelijk onderwijs door de respondenten, maar tevens een beperkt aandeel van deze aandacht in de concrete praktijk. Vanuit een theoretische visie hebben we in dit artikel die aandacht voor levenservaringen van leerlingen als een belangrijk middel voor dialoog en ontmoeting benadrukt.

Vanuit de terugkerende discrepantie tussen ontmoeting en dialoog als kernwaarden van de school enerzijds en de praktijk van het levensbeschouwelijk onderwijs anderzijds is in het onderzoek van fase 4 een bijdrage aan die praktijk

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geleverd door middel van een participatief actieonderzoek met leerkrachten van één samenwerkingsschool. Dit deel van het onderzoek is te lezen in hoofdstuk 5. In dit actieonderzoek hebben leerkrachten, die normaal gesproken gescheiden levensbeschouwelijk onderwijs aanbieden, een gezamenlijke viering voor alle leerlingen ontworpen. Daarbij werd door de onderzoeker het concept van dialoog gericht ingebracht, op basis van de hierboven geschetste bevindingen uit eerder onderzoek. We hebben in kaart gebracht welke motieven de leerkrachten formuleerden voor deze viering en hoe ze deze evalueerden. We zagen dat de leerkrachten deze viering zagen als een zinvolle expressie van de waarde van ontmoeting en een goede manier om levenservaringen te delen met alle leerlingen. We stelden daarbij vragen aan de rol van de leerkracht bij het laten voeren van dialoog en aan de levensbeschouwelijke inhoud van de viering.

Om een evenwichtige relatie tussen de schoolwaarden en het levensbeschouwelijk onderwijs van een impuls te voorzien brachten we in ons vijfde artikel John Dewey's concept van democratisch onderwijs in. Dit artikel is te lezen in hoofdstuk 6. Aan de hand van een theoretische verkenning van dit concept concluderen we dat democratische praktijken van dialoog en het verkennen van verschillen expliciet en nadrukkelijk georganiseerd dienen te worden in het onderwijs op samenwerkingsscholen. Dit bepleiten we met het oog op het uitdrukken van schoolwaarden en het stimuleren van de identiteitsontwikkeling van leerlingen. Als een consequentie van het onderzoek naar Dewey's concept en van ons pleidooi onderstrepen we het belang van gezamenlijke en dialogische momenten binnen het levensbeschouwelijk onderwijs voor alle leerlingen en het gebruik van een variatie aan zingevingsbronnen.

4. *Conclusies*

We hebben onze onderzoeksvraag beantwoord door in de verschillende hoofdstukken te wijzen op de waarde die de vertegenwoordigers van samenwerkingsscholen toekennen aan de ontwikkeling van wederzijds begrip tussen en het samenleven van hun leerlingen, op basis van gelijkwaardigheid. Ze onderstrepen deze waarde juist tegen de achtergrond van de unieke diversiteit van een samenwerkingsschool. In het verlengde van deze conclusie hebben we ook geconstateerd dat het levensbeschouwelijk onderwijs op deze scholen een nadruk op de (protestants-)christelijke traditie kent.

We hebben hierbij de vraag gesteld hoe deze nadruk zich verhoudt tot de schoolwaarde van gelijkwaardigheid en het belang van het leren omgaan met verschillen in het onderwijs en in de samenleving door de leerlingen.

In onze studie van de praktijk van het levensbeschouwelijk onderwijs signaleerden we ook een discrepantie tussen dialoog, als een belangrijke manier om de waarde van ontmoeting tussen leerlingen gestalte te geven, enerzijds en de praktijken van dagopeningen en vieringen anderzijds. Veel van deze momenten worden voor leerlingen van openbaar onderwijs en leerlingen van confessioneel onderwijs afzonderlijk georganiseerd. De twee voormalige schoolidentiteiten blijven in dit levensbeschouwelijk onderwijs bestaan. Met onze bijdrage middels een participatief actieonderzoek en het inbrengen van Dewey's concept van democratisch onderwijs hebben we een stimulans gegeven aan het levensbeschouwelijk onderwijs op samenwerkingsscholen dat zich positief verhoudt tot de kernwaarden van de vertegenwoordigers van de school en de diversiteit binnen de school en in de samenleving.

5. *Reflectie en toekomst*

Samenwerkingsscholen groeien in aantal. Er worden meerdere namen aan gegeven en visies op ontwikkeld. Ook bij Hogeschool Windesheim komen er meer en meer aanvragen binnen om teams en ouders te ondersteunen bij het vormen van een visie op identiteit en levensbeschouwelijk onderwijs van bestaande en nog te fuseren scholen. Ons onderzoek van de afgelopen jaren draagt bij aan de professionalisering van de leerkrachten bij deze vragen naar identiteit en levensbeschouwelijke vorming van leerlingen. Een krachtig kenmerk van het onderzoek is de voortdurende aandacht voor de specifieke context waarin de meeste samenwerkingsscholen zich bevinden: het samengaan van twee scholen met een eigen identiteit. Met een onderbouwing die aansluit bij actuele wetenschappelijke literatuur over levensbeschouwelijke vorming in diversiteit hebben we een bijdrage geleverd aan de consistente verhouding tussen de kernwaarden van de scholen en de praktijk van levensbeschouwelijk onderwijs zoals dat door de leerkracht wordt ingevuld. We hebben daarbij de organisatie van dialogische en democratische praktijken, juist met het oog op de ontmoeting tussen leerlingen met een seculiere en een confessionele achtergrond, als grote uitdaging van een samenwerkingsschool onderstreept.

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Curriculum Vitae

Erik Renkema (Groningen, 1972) completed secondary education in 1990 at 'De Waezenburg' in Leek. He studied at the Teacher Training Institute 'Nijenborgh' in Groningen from 1990-1994. Working as a primary school teacher, he also studied theology at the Northern University Leeuwarden (NHL) (1994-1998). After graduating, he worked as a pastor (kerkelijk werker) at the Protestant Church in Hoogezand-Sappemeer (1998-2001). After working as a primary school teacher in Velsbroek (2001-2005), he became teacher of Religious Education at Iselinge University in Doetinchem: a Teacher Training Institute for primary education. In 2008 he completed his master studies Religious Education at VU University in Amsterdam. Since 2008 he works at Windesheim University in Zwolle and Almere, teaching Religious Education at the Teacher Training Institute for secondary education (2008-2012), at the Teacher Training Institute for primary education (2009-present) and as assistant professor Religious Education and Diversity for the Research Group of Theology and Worldview (2017-present).

Since 2012 he conducted his PhD research at the Protestant Theological University Amsterdam, the Research Centre of Youth, Church and Culture (PThU) and Windesheim University.

Erik is married to Margriet Drent. Together with their daughters Berit (2007) and Silke (2009) they live in Amersfoort.



